Australian Consumers' Association

December 2000

CHOICE

www.choice.com.au

Supermarket prices down

– competition out

65 shiraz under $20:

what's the best?

Scooters

shoddy products or reckless riders?

MORE TESTS: Gas barbecues • Ice cream makers

Surviving the latest fad: scooters

Jane Mackenzie

Scooters have been in the news a lot lately: suddenly the old toy has a new lease of life as the latest fad and a must-have fashion accessory. Judging by subscriber calls to CHOICE, they're on a good many Christmas wish lists for all ages.

Unfortunately the news hasn't all been good — reports of accidents and apparent product failures have cast a bit of a wet blanket over the fun. And with dozens now on the market, how do you know which to buy?

We can't test them all, and the few we did test (see page 19) didn't fall apart or cause any dramatic accidents. Then again, we didn't jump the scooters or do the kinds of stunts some riders put them through. Some manufacturers advise you not to use them like this, but how many teenagers are going to take any notice?

So we've provided a good guide to what to look for when you're buying a scooter — the things to check that should help you get a reasonably safe and durable model. And we'd also recommend riders taking a leaf out of inline skaters' and cyclists' books: wear a helmet and elbow and knee pads.

Finally, don't expect miracles. If the price seems too good to be true, it probably is. Many of the reported problems have been with cheaper models.

We hope this issue of CHOICE will help you with your Christmas shopping not just for scooters, but also for other seasonal goodies: gas barbecues, ice cream makers and shiraz. All the staff at CHOICE wish you a very happy Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

Jane Mackenzie
Editor

YOUR NEXT ISSUE...

... will be the combined Jan/Feb 2001 issue. You should receive it in late January or very early February.

Your letters

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't personally answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

Write to us at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
Phone us on (02) 9577 3399. Fax us on (02) 9577 3355.
email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.
Web address: www.choice.com.au.

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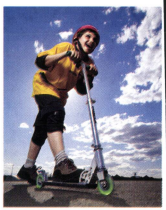
They may be a popular Christmas pressie, but rapidly mounting injuries reveal another more dangerous side to these zippy scooters.

Cover photo: Kent Mears



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A very versatile wine, and covered a lot in the media recently. Can you get a decent shiraz for less than $20? Have a look at our top selection.

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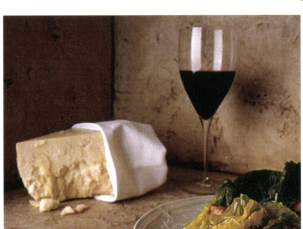
Sizzling snags, succulent steaks or delicious vegie kebabs (and a glass of shiraz, of course) — a barbecue's the go. We tested eight gas trolley models.

44 **Ice cream made at home**

Treat yourself — relax after the barbie with some yummie home-made ice cream. Check out our test results, and our recipes.



CHOICE Online

Don't forget: if you're a current CHOICE subscriber you can also have a free subscription to our website: **www.choice.com.au**. Just call Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready.

REQUEST A TEST

REQUEST A TEST

If you've seen something you'd like us to test, email us at requestatest@choice.com.au or call us on (02) 9577 3399.

Road rules for Christmas pressies

With the holiday season upon us and Santa's sack likely to be bulging with scooters, skateboards, inline skates and bikes, now is the perfect time for a road rules refresher.

In particular, we're concerned about the rules regarding riding on a footpath. Pedestrians have the right of way on any footpath, and people riding so-called 'wheeled recreational devices' (a transport category that includes skateboards, roller skates and inline skates) must respect this. However — and at the risk of sounding like the old school headmaster — there are a few inconsiderate people spoiling things for everyone else, and the recent explosion in the use of scooters has many among the more vulnerable pedestrians worried.

We've discussed the road rules for scooter riders in our article on scooters (see page 20). Basic rules for other popular human-powered modes of transport are as follows.

Bikes

- Everyone must wear an approved helmet — look for one with the Standards Australia ticks (see the May 2000 issue of CHOICE for our test of bike helmets). It must be securely fitted and fastened on the rider's head — which may sound pretty obvious, but you'd be amazed how many people think that riding around with the straps undone, or having it strapped to the front of the bike, will suffice.

IF YOU'RE 12 OR OVER ...

- You mustn't ride on the footpath unless you're an adult accompanying a child under 12.
- If you're aged 12–17, you can also ride on the footpath if you're accompanying an adult who's supervising a child under 12. So if your mum and your little brother are riding on the footpath, you can too.

IF YOU'RE UNDER 12 ...

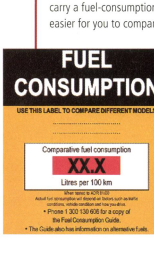
- You can ride on the footpath, but you have to keep to the left and give way to pedestrians.
- In places where there are lots of pedestrians (near shops, for example), or where there are vulnerable pedestrians (like small children, the elderly, or people with disabilities), you'll sometimes find a *No Bicycles* sign — heed it. But parents should help kids understand that even when there's no sign, it might be safer and more courteous to get off the bike and walk it when there are pedestrians about.

Skateboards, roller skates and inline skates

- Generally speaking, whatever your age, you're allowed to ride on the footpath. However, local councils may prohibit their use in certain places — these areas will be signposted.
- Pedestrians have right of way. When riding on the footpath, you must keep to the left and give way to pedestrians.
- When you're using a separated path — that is, where one side is designated for bicycles and the other for pedestrians — you must use the section designated for bikes.
- You mustn't ride on any road with a dividing line or median strip, or any one-way road with more than one marked lane. So quiet suburban streets with no lane markings are OK.
- You mustn't travel on a road between sunset and sunrise.

New fuel consumption label

Fuel prices have skyrocketed lately — perhaps enough to make you concerned about your car's fuel consumption, and want your next one to be more efficient. As of January 1, 2001, all new passenger cars, 4WDs and commercial vehicles up to 2.7 tonnes sold in Australia will have to carry a fuel-consumption label — so it'll be easier for you to compare models and choose a fuel-efficient one.


FUEL CONSUMPTION
USE THIS LABEL TO COMPARE DIFFERENT MODELS
Comparative fuel consumption
XX.X
Litres per 100 km
When tested to ADR 81/02
Actual fuel consumption will depend on factors such as traffic conditions, vehicle condition and how you drive
• Phone 1 300 130 606 for a copy of the Fuel Consumption Guide.
• The Guide also has information on alternative Fuels.

The red, yellow and black sticker, introduced by the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO), looks a bit like the energy label you're probably familiar with from your fridge or washing machine. It shows the car's fuel consumption in litres per 100 km, so the lower the number, the better. A difference in fuel consumption of 1 L per 100 km will cost — or save — you about $135 a year (assuming 15,000 km/year and petrol at 90 cents a litre).

The consumption rating is based on a standard city drive cycle to let you compare different models. However, the actual consumption you'll achieve can be considerably different, depending on:

- Your driving style: such as avoiding hard acceleration and braking.
- The car's condition: for example, keeping the tyres inflated as recommended and the engine well tuned.
- Traffic conditions: such as spending a lot of time stuck in traffic jams.

The AGO website has tips on how you can drive fuel-efficiently and a database with fuel-consumption figures for cars manufactured since 1986 — useful if you want to buy or already drive a used car: www.greenhouse.gov.au/transport/fuelguide/.

About 16% of Australian greenhouse gas emissions come from the transport sector, and a large chunk of that from cars. Each litre of petrol produces about 2.5 kg of greenhouse gases, each litre of diesel about 3 kg. But that's not all. Motor vehicles are the main culprits for air pollutants such as carbon monoxide (about 90%), oxides of nitrogen (about 80%), hydrocarbons (about 40%) and particles (about 30%).

With this new label you can make an informed decision, saving on fuel costs and helping the environment. And if manufacturers accept that low fuel consumption is a marketing advantage, we'll eventually see more efficient models on the market.

Avoiding Christmas shopping hassles

Christmas — when shopping is really in earnest! Here's how to avoid hassles if you need to get a refund, cancel a lay-by or replace something that's faulty.

■ **Ask if the store will give you a refund if you change your mind.**

Retailers don't have to refund your money just because you change your mind unless they say so in an advertised policy or they've told you they will.

No matter where you're shopping, even if you're buying online, it's a good rule of thumb to ask before you purchase if you can get a refund and under what conditions. Keep the receipt because you'll need it if you want to return the item.

It's better to shop where you know you can get a full refund on items you need to return. If the store only offers an exchange, you may not find anything else suitable. If they only offer a credit note, these usually have a time limit on them, and if you can't find something you want in that time, it's wasted.

■ **If goods are faulty, take them back to the retailer for a refund.**

If the goods are defective, you can insist on a full refund. You might be happy with an exchange or repair, but you have the right to get your money back. You'll have to show proof of purchase.

■ **Expect to pay a fee if you cancel a lay-by, but the retailer must be able to justify it.**

If you need to opt out of a lay-by, you'll probably have to pay a fee. You should have been informed about this when you made the lay-by, as part of the conditions.

However, the retailer must be able to justify the cancellation fee, which covers costs such as storage, administration and loss of value of the goods.

If you have a dispute with a retailer and can't resolve it yourself, contact your local fair trading or consumer affairs authority. If you have online access, you can find contact details at www.choice.com.au.

Lay-by hassle

One CHOICE Online reader was so annoyed that his girlfriend and her friends had been charged $150 to cancel a lay-by, he posted a message on our *Your Rights* forum asking for advice.

The saleswoman in a major women's fashion store had told them they'd pay a $20 fee if they changed their minds about four dresses they'd chosen. But when they cancelled, they were told it was $20 or 20%, whichever was greater.

"After several weeks of talking to [the store] management, we had no luck," he said. The store said the terms were printed on the lay-by statement, and the best it would offer was a credit note.

The reader sought advice from both Consumer Affairs and the CHOICE Online team, who advised him that the retailer had to justify the cancellation charge as costs associated with the lay-by.

So, armed with our advice, he returned to the store and told them a credit note wasn't good enough. The company's regional manager was called in and at first was reluctant to help, until told that the consumer had been advised by CHOICE and Consumer Affairs.

"After much discussion we received a refund of the full amount, because 'it wasn't enough money to worry about'… why didn't they just agree to the refund initially if the money was such an insignificant amount?"

His advice to other consumers: "Never give up!"

If you'd like to share any shopping hassles you've experienced with other consumers, post a message on the *Your Rights* forum at www.choice.com.au.

IN THE NEWS …

Laundry disc distributor taken to the cleaners

Last year, in April's *The hard word*, we poked fun at the **STEREO LAUNDRY DISC,** which promised 'high-fidelity washing'. CHOICE tests of such laundry discs and balls concluded that the high-flown claims of cleaning power lacked fidelity (that is, they didn't work) — although, to be fair, we didn't actually test how good the washing sounded afterwards. Anyway, we found the whole concept of hifi washing quite hilarious.

Not everyone, however, was similarly amused. The Queensland Office of Fair Trading had the **STEREO LAUNDRY DISC** tested and (as with those we tested) found it was no better than washing in plain water. In two separate cases the disc's distributors were fined a total of $48,500, plus court costs for breaching the Fair Trade Act.

"It shows that Queensland is no place for business people who make outlandish claims about their products and take money from consumers under false pretences," said Judy Spence, Minister for Fair Trading.

Great work, Queensland, and let's see more attempts to rid the country of shonks flogging products that patently don't work.

Corrections

What's the good oil?

CHOICE, NOVEMBER 2000

In our list of **Best Buys** (page 8), **COLAVITA Extra Virgin Olive Oil** is listed as Spanish. In fact it's from Italy; the table on page 13 is correct.

Rangehoods

CHOICE, OCTOBER 2000

In the *Recirculating mode* table, page 42, the carbon filter costs per year for the **WHIRLPOOL AKR 628 WH** should have been $75 (not $30) to replace once a year, $150 (not $60) to replace twice.

Deceptive packaging

Drink and regret!

Yum — a lime sports drink, strawberry-flavoured milk, and peach and mango nectar. Hang on … it's **cleansing gel, bubble bath** and **shower gel**!

When we went looking for shower gels for an upcoming test, we were astonished to find the products pictured.

THE BODY SHOP shower gel, for example, looks very much like juice — it smells like juice, it's got "*juice it*" in big letters on the label and a picture of fruit underneath. The bottle of the **STAR & ROSE** milky bubble bath resembles a popular milk drink, has a picture of a person in a bath holding up a milk shake on the label and a "serving suggestion" next to it. And its **Body Quench** cleansing gel also features a "serving suggestion" and symbols for travel, sport and home on its label.

All three of these cosmetic products are in packaging that's very easily confused with popular drinks — and not only by children. While **THE BODY SHOP** gel was around the CHOICE office, several people asked whether **THE BODY SHOP** now sold drinks too. So you can imagine what a three-year-old would do if you left the bottle in reach.

There's no real harm done swallowing a bit of shower gel, and no medical intervention is required if it happens. The taste would probably stop the child from drinking more. But cosmetics containers shouldn't be made to look as though they contain a tasty drink, potentially confusing children as to what's all right to drink and what isn't.

We'd like to see an end to this silly marketing strategy, and all of these products repackaged. Attaching a sticker that says it's "Not for internal consumption" may stop adults from drinking it, but not young children who can't read yet.

Update

Binoculars

CHOICE, JUNE 2000

In the table (page 42), we were unable to give warranty and origin details for the **SWAROVSKI Pocket 8 x 20B**. The company has now informed us that the international warranty is 30 years, and the binoculars are made in Austria.

We also said the housing was plastic. In fact it's diecast aluminium with rubber armouring.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

Fancy a boutique British beer?

We figured a few of you'll be heading off to old Blighty for Christmas, so we couldn't resist passing on the results of *Which?* magazine's bottle-conditioned beer test. Unlike your typical lager, these aren't pasteurised, filtered or artificially carbonated — the yeast sediment remains in the bottle, providing natural effervescence and sometimes a fair wallop of alcohol (up to 9%).

So what do they taste like? According to the experts, bubblegum, banana, spices, apples, figs and Christmas pudding flavours feature somewhere along the line (hang on — this is *beer* we're talking about, isn't it?). The top beers were **ST AUSTELL'S CLOUDED YELLOW**, **FULLER'S 1845 ALE** and **PILGRIM BREWERY'S SPRINGBOCK**. **GALE'S PRIZE OLD ALE** and **YOUNG'S SPECIAL LONDON ALE** also rated well. They're available from British supermarkets, so why not try something a little different?

More booze news

If you're not a shiraz fan (see *Cheers!*, page 8), how about some chardonnay, sauvignon blanc or cabernet sauvignon? The US consumer magazine pitted some large-scale production wines from our part of the world against others from California, and you'll be pleased to know that the bog-standard tipples from the local grog shop topped the lists.

For a gutsy barbecue accompaniment, the **LINDEMANS BIN 45** cabernet sauvignon should do the trick — it came out number one in their test. The warmer weather may better suit chilled white wines, in which case the **LINDEMANS BIN 65** chardonnay comes highly recommended, especially for the price, with the **ROSEMOUNT** chardonnay also scoring well. In the sauv blanc variety, a New Zealand Marlborough region wine, **BABICH MARLBOROUGH**, topped the list — no surprises there.

Heavy metals in unlikely places

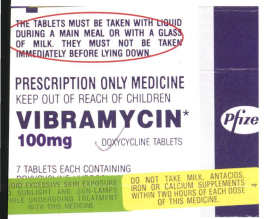
Do you buy potatoes, oranges or onions packed in orange-coloured nets because they're more environmentally friendly than plastic bags? Austria's *Konsument* recently reported that some of these nets contain considerable amounts of heavy metals such as lead and chromium (mainly from the yellow, red and orange colours).

The heavy metals in the nets don't present a direct health hazard — they won't migrate into the fruit or vegetables. However, they make the disposal of the nets more problematic. *Konsument* advises consumers to buy unpackaged fruit and vegetables to help ease the environmental burden of incinerating or landfilling materials with heavy metals.

Vibramycin: how to take it

I normally enjoy the howlers you reproduce on the back of CHOICE each month, but the source of the anomaly in the labelling applied to the Vibramycin pack has been wrongly attributed (*Hard Word*, CHOICE, October 2000).

You ask why the labelling on the packet (that is, what we printed) seems to conflict with the accompanying sticker (applied by the dispensing pharmacist). The question should really be asked the other way round: why has the pharmacist applied a sticker that contains advice in conflict with dosing recommendations based on the approved product information?


THE TABLETS MUST BE TAKEN WITH LIQUID DURING A MAIN MEAL OR WITH A GLASS OF MILK. THEY MUST NOT BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY BEFORE LYING DOWN
PRESCRIPTION ONLY MEDICINE
KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN
VIBRAMYCIN*
100mg
DOXYCYCLINE TABLETS
7 TABLETS EACH CONTAINING
DO NOT TAKE MILK, ANTACIDS, IRON OR CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTS WITHIN TWO HOURS OF EACH DOSE OF THIS MEDICINE
Pfize

Doxycycline, the active ingredient of Vibramycin, has some important differences from earlier-generation tetracycline antibiotics. As acknowledged in the approved product information, it's well absorbed in the presence of food or milk, so the gastric upsets that occur when many antibiotics are taken on an empty stomach (as many have to be, if they're to work properly), are much less likely to occur. The recommendation to avoid Vibramycin in conjunction with iron or calcium supplements or with antacids (since tetracyclines form non-absorbable complexes with metal cations) is consistent with the approved product information.

The advice about taking the tablets with food and milk, and about not lying down straight after taking them, is important, since doxycycline can cause severe irritation and even ulceration if released from the tablet while it's still in the oesophagus. Food or milk plus the upright posture will help speed the transit of the tablet to the stomach, where it's meant to release the active material. We provide this advice conspicuously on the pack as shown in your illustration, and in other parts as well, to ensure it isn't missed (or obscured by the pharmacist's label).

The advice about avoiding excessive exposure to sunlight or sun lamps is consistent with our product information.

May we look forward to an acknowledgement that any inconsistency between our approved labelling and subsequently applied supplementary labels is the responsibility of the dispenser, not the manufacturer?

Dr M M Lawrie
Director, Medical Affairs
Pfizer Pty Ltd
West Ryde, NSW

Thanks for the clarification.

Some thoughts on HDTV

I agree with your fine article on digital television (CHOICE, August 2000), but would like to note a number of points.

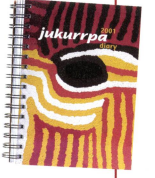
- You mentioned that new wide-screen high-definition (HD) TV sets were likely to cost in excess of $8000 initially. There'll be no wide-screen HDTV sets at $A8000 — the average HDTV set in the first year in the USA cost the equivalent of around $A20,000. And prices for the same level of sets haven't dropped significantly.
- HDTV is considered a commercial failure in the USA — Sony has announced it's stopping the manufacture of new-model HDTV sets. A lower-standard HDTV is closer to standard-definition (SD) TV than to the best HDTVs the government has been describing since the inception of mandated HDTV.
- It's quite possible that HDTV could be switched off (or the mandate removed) within two years, making both the manufacture and purchase dubious propositions.
- The unsubsidised prices of the most popular set-top boxes in Europe are around $A1000 per TV in the house. A good modern antenna with the right cable and Channel 12 should be OK for receiving digital TV if there's a good signal in your area (many antennas don't meet this standard), but there'll be nowhere near full coverage on January. 1, 2001.
- The fact that the spectrum given away has been valued at several billion dollars — or that taxpayers will be paying for it to be given away — has aroused little comment among the public, which puzzles me.

Alex Encel [Retailer]
International Dynamics
Australasia
Richmond, Victoria

Mr Encel raises important issues. The pricing and availability of digital television receiver equipment remains very uncertain, and the business model for interactive services is unclear. Consumers will be faced with a number of technical issues and complex decisions to make as they enter the digital TV era. All parts of the industry and government regulators will have to work together to minimise the pain and maximise the consumer benefit from this new technology.

Letter of the month

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Alex Encel, of Richmond, Victoria, receives a 2001 Jukurrpa diary or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 35 to 37.



We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.

HAD ANY POSITIVE OUTCOMES TO A COMPLAINT LATELY?

We'd like to hear about any particularly *positive* outcomes you've had following a complaint to a retailer, manufacturer or tradesperson: companies that responded to your complaint promptly, effectively, courteously and perhaps with more consideration than you expected. It might encourage others to 'do something' about products or services they're dissatisfied with. And who knows, perhaps such a ***Thumbs up*** section could be an incentive to goods and services providers to smarten up their complaints procedures. Address your letters or emails to 'Thumbs up' at the address on page 2.

Cheers!

Shiraz is the second most widely grown wine grape variety in Australia — and it's made into top-selling red wines. Here's a guide to choosing among a wide range of bottles selling for around $20 or less.

IN BRIEF

- Six wine experts tasted and rated 65 Australian shiraz. Five ranked as very good, 17 as good. Find out on page 12 whether your preferred drop is among them.
- Twenty-eight wines were judged of average commercial quality, eight below average and two are not recommended. The experts couldn't agree on five bottles — we've listed them as 'mixed emotions'. Read their descriptions in the table (page 13) to see if they might be to your taste.

BECAUSE OF ITS SPICY, PEPPERY characters, Australian shiraz perfectly complements red meat, and goes particularly well with a juicy steak. If you're a vegetarian, team it up with a juicy ratatouille or vegetable curry. And it's great with cheese, of course. So if you're looking for a red to drink while catching up with friends and relatives during the holidays, you can't go wrong stocking up on shiraz.

Distinctive flavours

Shiraz grapes are planted widely in many Australian wine-growing regions. The special characteristics of the region, climate and soil all combine to give the wine its distinctive range of flavours. Grown in cooler climates, shiraz grapes often produce a spicy, peppery red wine. In warmer areas, fruit, berry and earthy characters tend to dominate to produce a full-bodied, rich red wine.

The shiraz grape variety, also known as French syrah or hermitage, originated in the Shiraz region in Persia (now Iran) and grows well in the French Rhône Valley, from where it was brought to Australia in the mid 19th century.

Australia's winemaking history spans nearly two centuries, and for much of the last one shiraz was the premium grape grown. A couple of decades ago, though, shiraz slipped down in the ratings, and most of it was blended with cabernet sauvignon and other cabernet varieties, which had become more popular. But by the end of the 1990s, shiraz had regained its status.

Of the 60 or so different grape varieties grown in Australia, shiraz has become the second most widely grown (after chardonnay) — and it's made into one of our top-selling red wines. (For some statistics see *The Australian wine industry in brief*, right.)

Under $20 OK?

Our initial market research revealed well over 500 different Australian shiraz wines — far too many, of course, for the purposes of a wine tasting (*Our expert panel*, above right, introduces who judged the wines for us). So we bought all the brands we could find in at least five stores and three states, and costing $20 or less (pre-GST pricing; some bottles now sell for a little more). This is the most popular price range, which obviously excludes Australia's greatest red wine made from shiraz grapes: **PENFOLDS Grange.**

We also included two slightly more expensive wines, selling for around $25, to see whether they'd be rated higher than those that cost $20 or less. They weren't; both received average scores. We haven't included them in the table, but they do show there's no guarantee of a better wine if you pay a bit more.

Our expert panel

Many thanks go to the members of our expert wine-tasting panel (shown from left to right in the photo):

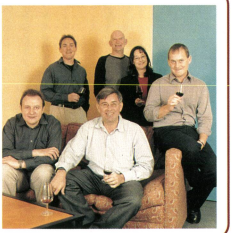
Back row:

- Mark Richardson, winemaker, Tyrrell's Wines.
- Peter Bourne, wine writer/consultant.
- Louisa Rose, winemaker, Yalumba.
- Stephen Pannell, winemaker, BRL Hardy.

Seated:

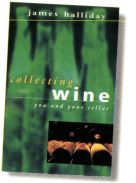
- David Wollan, wine consultant.
- Ian Cook, wine retailer.

If you'd like to know more about our tasters and have online access, go to www.choice.com.au, click on 'Food' and then go to 'At the bottleshop'.



SERIOUS ABOUT CELLARING?

■ If you're serious about storing wine in an underground cellar, get expert advice or consult a book like James Halliday's *Collecting wine: you and your cellar.* The book discusses temperature, humidity and other cellaring matters in detail and offers some low-cost solutions to common problems. See *Consumer Bookshelf* on page 35 if you'd like to order it.



The verdict

Judging from our tasters' verdict, you'd be pretty happy with about a third of the wines in our taste test. Five were ranked as 'very good' and 17 as 'good'. Almost half (28) were rated as 'average', meaning they're of average commercial quality and have no faults. The experts considered the eight wines that were rated below average to be below acceptable commercial drinking quality, but still they have only minor faults, if any.

The tasters considered two wines in the test to have major faults; they're rated as 'not recommended'. One of these, the **BOTOBOLAR Mudgee Shiraz 1999**, was the only wine in our selection that had no preservatives (see note 1, page 11, for more on additives in wine). The experts said it tasted thin and oxidised, and smelled very rancid and sulphidic. According to the panel, the problems associated with the taste of this wine are common in organic or preservative-free wines. As one panel member said: "We'll have to change our palates" to appreciate the taste of such wine.

Equal

The Australian wine industry in brief

■ There are around 1200 wineries in Australia, growing wine on more than 120,000 hectares.

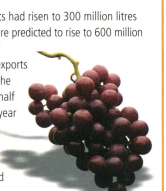
■ In 1999 chardonnay was the most widely grown wine grape variety (210,770 tonnes), followed by shiraz (192,330 tonnes), cabernet sauvignon (127,494 tonnes), semillon (80,191 tonnes), colombard (34,781 tonnes) and merlot (31,801 tonnes).

■ In 1998–99, over a million tonnes of crushed grapes produced close to 800 million litres of wine.

■ Wine production doubled from the post-World War II years to the late 1960s, and has more than trebled since then.

■ Australian wine exports had risen to 300 million litres by September 2000. They're predicted to rise to 600 million litres by 2025.

■ The bulk of our wine exports has traditionally gone to the UK, which bought nearly half our export volume in the year ending September 2000. Other important export partners include the US, New Zealand, Canada and Germany.



WHICH ONES FOR CELLARING?

How do you know which wine is suitable for cellaring? Which will improve over the years? And which bottle should you buy if you want to keep a memento for future years?

Unfortunately there's no general answer to these questions. It's best to follow the retailer's or winemaker's advice on how long to keep a particular wine. And it's always better to drink a wine early than wait till it's past its peak.

Wine in small bottles matures faster than in big bottles because the ratio of wine to air is smaller. So if you want to buy a particular vintage as a memento and plan to drink it many years later, choose a larger bottle — a magnum holds 1.5 L (and an imperial 6 L, but that's rare!).

WHAT TO BUY

TOLLANA Eden Valley Adelaide Hills Bin TR 16 Shiraz 1998	$18
BROWN BROTHERS Shiraz Victoria 1998	$18
HASELGROVE McLaren Vale Picture Series Shiraz 1999	$16
ROBERTSON'S WELL Coonawarra Shiraz 1998	$20
ROSEMOUNT ESTATE Shiraz Estate 1999	$15

TO YOUR HEALTH!

Do you enjoy a glass of red with your meals but are worried what it'll do to your health? Relax. Research has shown that regular (but moderate!) red wine drinkers have up to half the heart disease rate of non-drinkers. Some of this might be due to the antioxidants present in red wine (and also in grape juice), which prevent oxidation of 'bad' cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein). LDL is involved in the build-up of arterial plaque, which can cause fatal heart attacks — it turns really nasty when it's oxidised.

Research has also shown that red wine (or beer) drunk with a meal causes less heartburn than white wine. Water is best, of course, but probably not as interesting with a culinary feast.

Winetalk: from aldehyde to VA

If you're a novice to red wine appreciation, the following terms (some of which are used in the table on pages 12 and 13) will help you make sense of wine-tasting lingo.

- **Aldehyde:** A volatile substance with a characteristic aroma, present in most wines. Too much produces an unpleasant chemical taste or smell.
- **Balance:** All the flavour components should harmonise; no single one should dominate.
- **Band-Aid, farmyard:** see **Brett**.
- **Brett:** Short for *Brettanomyces,* a group of yeast species that can produce farmyard or Band-Aid smells in a wine. In small amounts these smells can add complexity, in larger amounts they're rather unpleasant.
- **Closed/tight:** Doesn't release aroma or flavour freely.
- **Dirty:** Indicates the presence of **sulphides** or **mercaptan** (see right).
- **Dusty:** A flavour sensation, usually due to **oak**, sometimes present in aged wine.
- **Earthy:** A taste sensation, not necessarily unpleasant, with mineral characters.
- **Farmyard:** see **Brett**.
- **Furry:** Soft tannin in red wine produces a furry sensation on the side of the tongue.
- **Green:** Immature.
- **Hard:** An excess of tannin or acid, which may improve with ageing.
- **Hollow:** Starts and finishes well, but lacks flavour in the middle part of your tongue.
- **Hot:** High alcohol level, which can produce a burning sensation or warm feeling in the mouth.
- **Hydrogen sulphide:** Rotten egg smell indicative of a grave winemaking fault (decaying yeast cells and yeast remnants).
- **Lifted:** A touch of **volatility** — not necessarily a fault.
- **Long:** A sign of quality, as in a lingering palate.
- **Meaty:** Raw meat smell that can be attractive in some styles of wine. Can be a function of **mercaptan**.
- **Mercaptan:** An unpleasant smell (of burnt rubber, garlic, asparagus or stale cabbage) derived from a particularly pungent class of sulphur compounds.
- **Mouldy:** An unpleasant aroma or taste due to a winemaking fault (mouldy grapes or casks) or a contaminated cork (see *Corked,* far right).
- **Nose:** The smell (or bouquet) of a wine.
- **Oak:** A smell and taste usually derived from maturation in an oak barrel.
- **Oxidation:** Overexposure to air, resulting in loss of flavour, a brown tinge and decomposition.
- **Peppery:** Spicy character often found in shiraz from a cool climate.
- **Pressings:** Wine produced from the pressed residue of skins and pips, without the free-run grape juice. It's rich in **tannin** and colour.
- **Sulphide:** Generic term for **hydrogen sulphide** and **mercaptan**.
- **Sulphur dioxide (220):** An antioxidant (preservative) used in most wines. Too much can leave an unpleasant smell.
- **Tannin (tannic acid):** Grape pips, skins and stalks (as well as wooden casks) naturally contain tannin, which acts as a preservative and imparts dryness to the finish.
- **Tight:** See **closed**.
- **Volatile acids:** Are present in all wine and give it a '**lift**'.
- **Volatile acidity (VA):** Spoilt by too much acetic acid, which turns wine vinegary.

Storing and cellaring wine

If you're like most people in Australia and don't have a purpose-built wine cellar, storing large quantities of bottled wine may be a problem. Our climate can have a detrimental effect on wine, which should be stored at a cool, even temperature.

A cool, dry and dark spot in or around the house may be appropriate, if the temperature is pretty constant. That could be a linen cupboard, an area under stairs or under the house.

Wine should ideally be stored at around 12–18°C. Lower temperatures inhibit its development, higher temperatures accelerate it inappropriately.

Keeping the temperature constant prevents wine from expanding and contracting, which can affect the seal of the cork and lead to oxidation (overexposure to air, which can cause browning, loss of flavour and decomposition).

Don't store wine in sunlight or under fluorescent lights; near a heating source, water heater or air conditioner (or on top of your fridge in the path of the warm air that comes up from the back); in places where the temperature fluctuates considerably (during the day and night or from summer to winter); or exposed to vibration. And don't store white wine for months in a fridge: it'll lose flavour.

Store the bottles lying down to keep the cork moist. Use the cardboard cartons the bottles are sold in (if you buy at least a dozen) for storage. It doesn't look as attractive as a decorative wine rack, but it protects the wine from light and slight temperature variations. (In an underground wine cellar, though, cardboard boxes are less suitable, as they may attract silverfish and disintegrate in floods.)

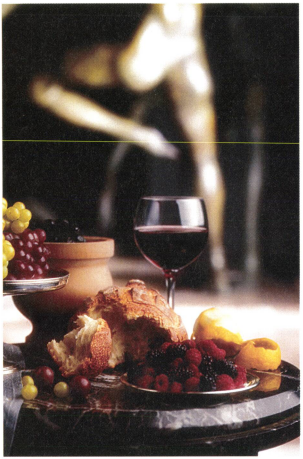
Enjoying your wine

Red wine is best drunk at room temperature or slightly below. About 15–18°C is appropriate for a medium-bodied wine, slightly warmer works well for a full-bodied and a few degrees cooler for a light-bodied red.

Not all experts agree that letting a wine 'breathe' before serving is beneficial, but for most reds — young wines in particular — it can't hurt either. Remove the cork about two hours before serving so the wine's exposed to air. Old wines may need more or less 'breathing' time depending on how fragile they are. For a valuable bottle of old red, get expert advice.

Old red wines can also benefit from decanting (transferring the wine into a decanter). Pour the wine gently, so the sediment stays in the bottle and the aromas can develop. Do it straight before serving and, if necessary, let it 'breathe' a little longer in the glass.

Serve red wine in a big glass with a rim narrower than the base, so you can swirl the wine around and savour the developing aromas.



CORKED

Not even the cheapest wine should taste like a hessian bag. If a bottle you ordered in a restaurant smells or tastes mouldy, it could be suffering from cork taint, a microbiological contamination of the cork. Ask for a new bottle. If it tastes the same, the wine's probably at fault.

The same goes for a wine you buy in a bottle shop: if it tastes off when you pour it, take the (full) bottle back for a replacement. Most winemakers and retailers encourage this, rather than having you think forever that the particular wine itself was bad.

Microbiological spoilage is hard to detect, and a small percentage of corks is contaminated before they go into the bottle. To overcome this problem, the industry is trialling other ways of sealing a bottle — with plastic corks or screwtop lids, for example. But all the wines in our tests were sealed the traditional way with a cork.

Table notes *(for the table overleaf)*

1 Additives

All but one of the wines (**BOTOBOLAR Mudgee Shiraz 1999**; see *The verdict*, page 9) have sulphur dioxide (220) added to them (one had 223, which is in the same class). It prevents the grapes from browning and acts as a preservative to prevent the growth of bacteria. Australian white wine usually contains around 120–160 ppm (parts per million) of sulphur dioxide, Australian reds much less (around 40 ppm), because they contain tannin, which acts as a natural preservative.

Up to 250 ppm of sulphur dioxide are currently permitted in wine, but the trend by Australian winemakers is to add less. In fact, most wouldn't add anywhere near this amount.

Many asthmatics are sensitive to sulphur dioxide. While some can react to levels as low as 1 ppm, acute attacks usually occur when people have eaten food with much higher SO_2 levels (1000–2000 ppm).

Sulphurous acid, produced when SO_2 is dissolved in water, can also cause gastric irritation in people with impaired kidney or liver function.

Some of the wines also contain ascorbic acid (300, vitamin C), added to prevent browning.

2 Score

Our expert tasters could award up to 20 points for each wine, according to the international tasting system: 3 for appearance, 7 for nose and 10 for palate. At wine shows, a wine that scores 18.5 points or more is awarded a gold medal, 17–18.4 points a silver and 15.5–16.9 points a bronze medal.

The tasters didn't know which wines they were tasting, though they did know they were priced around $20 or less. Their scores for each were averaged to produce the score given in the table.

Where the range of scores was too large to be meaningfully averaged, the wine was called a *Mixed emotion* (see page 13 at the bottom of the table) — the experts couldn't agree.

3 Tasting notes

These notes are compiled from our expert panel's notes on the wine's colour, nose, palate and overall impression. Together with the scores they should give you a good indication of the wine's character, aroma and flavour — and what's wrong with it, if it's faulty. See *Winetalk: from aldehyde to VA*, above left, for a 'translation' of some of the jargon used.

SHIRAZ

Brand and name (in rank order, alphabetical when equal)	Target price ($)*	Additives 1	Score 2	Tasting notes 3
Very good				
TOLLANA Eden Valley Adelaide Hills Bin TR 16 Shiraz 1998	18.00	220	17.5	Vivid purple colour; sweet plum, blueberry and peppery aromas; pleasant fresh berry flavours — "complex spicy style with great flavours for food", "aromatic, vibrant"
BROWN BROTHERS Shiraz Victoria 1998	18.00	220	17	Purple/magenta colour; ripe sweet plum and vanilla aromas; big fruit with big wood tannin, creamy oak finish — "elegant, fragrant style of full-bodied shiraz"
HASELGROVE McLaren Vale Picture Series Shiraz 1999	16.00	220	17	Purple/red colour; fragrant, confectionery aromas; complex palate, slightly hard acid finish — "good structure, fruit weight and length"
ROBERTSON'S WELL Coonawarra Shiraz 1998	20.00	220	17	Deep purple colour; ripe, black fruit aromas, oak dominant; rich, dense palate with dry oak finish — "very oaky style, people who like this style will applaud"
ROSEMOUNT ESTATE Shiraz Estate 1999	15.00	220	17	Purple colour; earthy, fresh blackberry and blackcurrant aromas; simple, cherry fruit palate, soft tannin and acid — "well handled wine with good balance"
Good				
E & C McLaren Vale Shiraz 1998	16.00	220	16.5	Deep garnet colour; warm, dark fruit aromas with hints of clove; good fruit and tannin balance — "pleasant ripe style"
MOONDAH BROOK Shiraz 1998	17.00	220	16.5	Purple/magenta colour; sweet, ripe fruit and powerful oak aromas; good palate with bold, earthy tannins, short, hard finish — "simple oak style"
WYNNS Coonawarra Estate Coonawarra Shiraz 1998	16.00	220	16.5	Deep purple colour; black fruits and spicy oak aromas; good, dark fruit flavours, tight palate, yet complex and well balanced — "food style of wine"
ANDREW GARRETT Bold Shiraz 1998	15.50	220	16	Dark red/purple colour; dusty aroma with fresh berry fruit; big, sweet fruit flavour, slightly acidic — "good length but without real excitement"
BROKENWOOD Shiraz 1998	22.00	220	16	Deep purple colour; dark fruit, rich chocolate, earthy aromas; lots of nutty, coffee grounds, fruit and savoury flavours, good complexity, hard finish — "food style of wine"
INGOLDBY McLaren Vale Shiraz 1998	15.50	220	16	Garnet colour; spicy fruits and subtle dusty oak aromas; sweet and juicy palate, nice length and balance, finish a touch acidic (but freshening) — "excellent food style of wine"
PENFOLDS Coonawarra Bin 128 1997	22.00	220	16	Deep garnet colour; liquorice, spice and mint aromas; intense plummy, earthy fruit flavours, ripe, sweet, long palate — "good, soft commercial style"
TAYLORS Shiraz 1999	15.00	220	16	Purple colour; fresh berry, plum and spice aromas; hints of spice, pepper and acid on the palate, long velvet tannins — "spicy, youthful style, good with food"
YALUMBA Shiraz Barossa Growers 1998	14.00	220	16	Deep ruby colour; ripe currant, plum and creamy aromas; sweet fruit and gamey flavours — "straightforward, but a crowd pleaser", "good if cheap"
BANROCK STATION Ball Island Shiraz 1999	11.00	220	15.5	Light garnet colour; ripe fruit and subtle spice aromas (also slightly stale/sulphidic); good depth and balance but lacks intensity — "a metallic edge is holding it back"
BLASS Barossa Shiraz 1996	20.00	220	15.5	Dark red colour; ripe, dark fruit and sweet coffee aromas; sweet oak palate — "barbecue red", "good commercial style"
LINDEMANS Limestone Coast Shiraz 1999	10.00	220	15.5	Purple colour; sweet fruit aromas, almost like lemonade but spicy and complex; good, fresh fruit palate, not much oak — "good, ripe fruit style — good if it's under $10"
MARGAN Shiraz 1999	19.50	220	15.5	Purple colour; closed nose, intense, spicy, dark fruit aromas with sweet undertones; earthy, plain, straightforward, a touch sour — "quite hard acid palate"
REDMAN Coonawarra Shiraz 1998	16.60	220	15.5	Dark purple colour; leather, ripe black fruit and tar aromas; powerful and intense palate, a little overextracted — "lovely dry style", "pressings"
RICHMOND GROVE Barossa Shiraz 1997	20.00	220	15.5	Black-red colour; intense, dark fruit and oak aromas; big, bold, simple, solid, a touch high VA sweetness — "very sweet fruit style with good intensity"
SEPPELT Chalambar Shiraz Victoria 1998	16.00	220	15.5	Deep purple colour; dark fruit, vanilla and oak aromas; powerful, ripe fruit and oak flavours, high acid — "party style"
TYRRELL'S Old Winery Shiraz 1998	14.00	220	15.5	Ruby colour; intense dark fruit and spice aromas; well balanced, berry flavours, high acid — "good food style with balanced oak and fruit"
Average				
ANNIE'S LANE Clare Valley Shiraz 1998	18.00	220	15	Ruby colour; closed nose, light cherry and dull spice aromas; sweet and simple palate, youthful and primary — "very attractive, simple fruit, spoilt a bit by too high acid"
BASEDOW Barossa Shiraz 1997	18.00	220	15	Dark red colour; charry oak over cherry fruit aromas; earthy, smoky palate, warm oak tannin with a dry finish — "a bit developed and hot, but good all the same"
BROWNS' OF PADTHAWAY T-Trellis Shiraz 1997	15.50	220	15	Medium red brick colour; spice, leather and plum aromas; good fruit intensity on the palate — "shows some bottle-developed characters", "drink it now"
BOBBIE BURNS Campbells Shiraz 1998	20.70	220	15	Dark red colour; plum and earthy (forest/mushroom) aromas; fruit and ripeness on the palate and a firm tannin finish — "simple, good commercial wine with lots of oak"
LEASINGHAM Clare Valley Bin 61 Shiraz 1997	20.00	220	15	Deep garnet colour; dusty, unpleasant, tomato sauce aroma; dry and savoury palate but lacks fruit intensity and focus — "ripe and oak dominated", "Band-Aid, farmyard"
LINDEMANS Bin 50 Shiraz 1998	8.00	220	15	Bright red/purple colour; spicy, fresh, fragrant aromas; palate shows some fruit complexity and toasty, savoury and oak flavours — "a simple, honest wine"
MAGLIERI OF McLAREN VALE Shiraz 1998	20.50	220	15	Dark red colour; smoky, ripe dark fruit aromas; palate lacks fruit sweetness — "mean", "slightly 'chewy' tannins, but good, honest Australian shiraz style"
NORMANS Shiraz South Australia 1998	14.00	220, 300	15	Bright red/purple colour; smoky bacon, oak aromas; elegant medium-bodied shiraz with good length — "lacks character and intensity but good commercial drink"
NORMANS Old Vine Shiraz 1998	20.60	220	15	Deep blood plum colour; chocolate, aldehyde and oak aromas; full-bodied, sweet, ripe flavours and big VA sweetness up front — "huge oak"
PETER LEHMANN The Barossa Shiraz 1998	19.00	224	15	Garnet colour; rich, dark fruit aromas with dusty overtones; ripe, jammy fruit flavours — "a bit dull and low in intensity, but a good commercial style"

Brand and name (in rank order, alphabetical when equal)	Target price ($)*	Additives	Score	Tasting notes
		1	2	3
RICHMOND GROVE Coonawarra Shiraz 1997	21.95	220	15	Red-brown colour; ripe fruit aromas with wet wool/musty overtones; sweet and complex fruit flavours but hard, metallic and acidic on the palate — "interesting"
MAMRE BROOK Barossa Valley Shiraz 1997	20.00	220	15	Dark red colour; porty, dried fruit and oak aromas; smoky, fruity palate with good length and richness — "well balanced, medium-weight tannin and soft, creamy finish"
SEPPELT Terrain Series Shiraz 1997	11.00	220	15	Dark ruby colour showing some age; smoky, stewed-plum aromas, a touch dusty; tarry flavours a bit dominant on the palate — "developed", "lacks some seductive charm"
WYNDHAM ESTATE Bin 555 Shiraz 1998	14.00	220	15	Intense red/purple colour; tight nose, sweet jammy and tarry aromas; soft and furry, sweet palate with ripe fruit flavours — "sweet, simple, fruit driven style"
YALUMBA Galway Vintage Shiraz 1999	10.00	220	15	Medium red colour; leafy, herbal and simple fruit aromas, lifted; soft, well balanced palate — "well made", "high acid and a bit thin"
KINGSTON ESTATE Shiraz 1999	12.00	220	14.5	Medium crimson colour; sweet, dark, smoky fruit and oak aromas; medium-weight palate with slightly bitter fruit flavours — "soft, savoury, dusty, length"
McWILLIAMS HANWOOD South Eastern Australia Shiraz 1999	10.30	220	14.5	Garnet colour; soft, fragrant cherry and raspberry aromas; smoky, oaky, light fruit flavours, a tad green — "medium-bodied, soft, easy, low-intensity quaffer"
PEPPER TREE WINES Shiraz 1998	18.00	220	14.5	Deep garnet colour; toasty oak, sweet plum and tarry aromas; ripe blackberry flavours but palate a bit thin and herbal — "not bad fruit sweetness and weight"
FOUR SISTERS Shiraz 1999	14.00	220	14.5	Bright purple/garnet colour; spicy, perfumed aromas of violet and dark plums; spicy, tight palate, firm and harsh, good fruit expression — "simple"
ANGOVE'S CR Classic Reserve Shiraz 1998	10.50	220	14	Garnet colour; simple, sweet, stewy, weedy aromas; palate shows some personality and some faults — "soft, easy, simple, boring"
CHATEAU TAHBILK Shiraz 1997	17.80	220	14	Garnet colour; slightly meaty and sulphidic and greener fruits aromas; soft, nutty, simple and plain palate, a touch stewed — "dry and firm but lacking fruit and charm"
DEAKIN ESTATE Shiraz 1999	10.35	220	14	Red/plum colour; leathery, overripe, stewy fruit aromas; light, insipid palate, warm finish, lacks weight — "palate has some spice but is simple and lacks excitement"
DEEN DE BORTOLI Vat 8 Shiraz 1998	11.00	220	14	Red/brown colour; musty aromas; simple fruit palate with earthy flavours over strong black fruits — "nice palate, dry tannins, OK length, acidic palate"
GNANGARA Shiraz 1998	12.00	220	14	Garnet colour; simple, dusty, cherry aromas; simple, clean palate lacking intensity and length — "low intensity, cheap quaffing"
JOHN JAMES McWILLIAM South Eastern Australia Shiraz 1998	13.50	220	14	Red colour; simple, subdued nose with dark fruit, earthy and herbal aromas; lean palate, watery, lacks fruit sweetness — "simple"
MITCHELTON Shiraz 1997	17.00	220	14	Ruby colour; berry, musk, spice and meaty aromas; dull palate, quite acidic and tannic — "lacks generosity of flavour"
SALTRAM Classic Shiraz 1998	11.00	220	14	Red/purple colour; herbal, lemon, menthol and cherry aromas with beefy undertones; sweet and intense palate, herbal notes — "soft, easy drink, a tad hard"
SCHULTZ'S VINEYARD Wrattonbully Shiraz 1997	17.95	220	14	Red colour starting to brown; leathery, sweaty, stewed spicy fruit aromas; soft, ripe palate with herbal, cherry flavours, no faults — "lacks fruit and freshness"
Below average				
DALFARRAS Shiraz 1997	18.00	220	13.5	Deep garnet colour; musty, mouldy, sulphidic aromas over dark ripe plum; plain, tarry, dirty palate, lacks sweetness — "palate is plain and tired", "quite 'bretty'"
FLANAGAN'S RIDGE Wrattonbully Shiraz 1996	16.75	220	13.5	Red/brown colour; smoky, leathery, earthy, green stalk aromas; hard, thin palate with aged characters — "quite developed", "solid, tarry wine, old-fashioned"
HALF MILE CREEK Shiraz 1998	11.50	220	13.5	Browny red colour showing some age; a touch herbal, volatile aromas; hard palate, tingling sour fruit — "very developed colour and aroma, palate dusty, stale"
JINDALEE Shiraz 1999	11.00	220	13.5	Ruby colour; stewed cabbage aromas; very stemmy flavours — "sulphide, underlying good, elegant palate"
LEYDENS VALE Shiraz 1997	16.50	220	13.5	Red colour fading with brown hues; stale, spicy aromas; lightweight, spicy, acid-driven with good use of oak — "too developed and tired"
MOUNT PLEASANT Philip Hunter Valley Shiraz 1996	15.50	220	13.5	Red/brown colour; leathery, earthy, dusty, spicy, charry aromas; palate dirty, plain, green, sour, tired/developed — "dull"
CRANSWICK ESTATE Vignette Range Shiraz 1997	11.50	220	13	Garnet colour; medicinal, coal tar, petrol aromas; sweet and sour, dried-out, developed palate, dull, thin, hard — "harsh, washed out", "brett?"
NOTTAGE HILL Shiraz 1998	9.00	220	13	Dark red/brick colour; smoky, musty, sour, cherry aromas; pleasant palate, but thin, dry, disjointed finish — "unattractive, dull and plain"
Not recommended				
BOTOBOLAR Mudgee Preservative Free Shiraz 1999	17.50	none	12	Ruby colour; earthy, dank sewer, very rancid (sulphide?) aromas, oxidised; palate dirty, big, sweet, flat — "something very wrong with this one", "organic"
PREECE Shiraz 1998	18.00	220	11.5	Garnet colour; savoury mince, cinnamon and VA aromas; volatile, simple and plain, vinegar, thin, unattractive, hard — "numerous faults"
Mixed emotions (in alphabetical order)				
CV Shiraz Western Australia 1998	15.50	220	14–17	Red/purple colour; strawberries and cream, dull chemical aromas; very sweet palate, ripe fruit flavours — "round, ripe, soft and dull", "a bit simple, but good commercial style"
GRANT BURGE BAROSSA VINES Shiraz 1998	16.00	220, 300	13–17.5	Red/purple colour; rotten fruit, lifted peppery fruit aromas; solid, earthy palate, lingering tannins — "good, well balanced", "straightforward, lacks grace and charm"
PENFOLDS Kalimna Bin 28 1997	20.00	220	14–17.5	Dark red/purple colour; dark fruit and chocolate aromas; ripe, soft and sweet palate, fruit/oak complexity — "good food wine", "soft, easy, earthy style, a touch dull"
PEPPERJACK Barossa Shiraz 1996	19.95	220	14–17	Deep ruby colour; cherry, mint, coconut aromas; big mouth feel, acid, alcohol, fruit and oak — "big, porty style of wine with dusty oak", "good fruit, too oaky"
RYMILL Coonawarra Shiraz 1997	21.00	220	14–18.5	Dark garnet colour; ripe dark fruit, spice and leather aromas; intense, complex, long, balanced fruit and tannins — "good savoury food style", "farmyard, simple palate"

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in September2000.

Prices down, competition out

Grocery prices are down by 4% on average, mostly in line with pre-GST predictions. But as far as competitive pricing is concerned — there isn't much.

IN BRIEF

- Average basket price: down 4%.
- Cheapest city: Newcastle (again).
- Cheapest states: ACT, SA.
- Cheapest chain: there's hardly any difference any more between the three major supermarkets (Franklins, Coles, Woolworths).
- Most expensive cities: Hobart, Launceston (again).
- Most expensive state: Tasmania (again).

THEY SAID YOUR WEEKLY grocery bill would drop after the GST — and they were right. Our latest supermarket price survey, done in late July, reveals that the price for a basket of groceries has dropped by 4% on average, compared with our previous survey in September 1999 (published in January/February 2000).

Usually we compare the average price changes (rises, primarily) for a basket of groceries with the increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) over the corresponding period. This year we timed the survey for late July — about a month into the new tax system — to see what effect the GST has had on grocery prices as well.

In the two years to June 2000, the CPI rise for food was around 6% (4.5% for the period June 1998 to September 1999, and 1.5% for the remainder). In our 1999 survey the price rises for our basket of groceries (around 3–5%) reflected this inflation figure. In this survey, however, the average price for the basket of groceries dropped by around 4%.

And here's the news in detail:

- 75% of the items surveyed were cheaper than last year.
- Half of these recorded post-GST prices lower than predicted.
- Only five items recorded slight price rises, contrary to pre-July predictions. (Milk was one of them; our end-July prices were gathered before the 'milk price war' drove prices for house-brand milk down in August.)

Waning competition

In previous years the survey results have enabled us to identify the major supermarkets with the lowest and highest prices for our basket and, for those in between, by how much they were more or less expensive than the average. This and last year, however, there hasn't been much news on the competition front.

In fact, there's hardly any difference at all between the three major chains: Coles, Franklins and Woolworths. Franklins is now on a par with Woolworths, its former competitive edge all but disappearing.

While Franklins was notably cheaper in the past, last year the price difference between this supermarket chain and the most expensive had shrunk to 2%. Now its prices are about average — less than a dollar cheaper (82 cents, to be precise) than at Coles, marginally the most expensive of the three chains.

Table 2, page 16, shows the three chains' average basket prices in the states where they compete with each other (ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria). The small price difference we found hardly warrants switching from one chain to another.

On special?

The price changes listed in Table 1 are regular prices; special prices weren't taken into account.

On average, 20% of the products in our survey were on special — slightly more than last year. It's a fairly large amount of specials, though not unusually high enough to skew the results. Supermarkets were probably trying to entice reluctant shoppers less than a month after the introduction of the GST.

Bi-Lo had the fewest items on special (9%), Franklins 14%, Coles 23% and Woolworths 27%.

So shop where it's convenient, where you find the range of products you're looking for and where the service is best.

Hopefully there'll be better news on competition next year, after the entry onto the Australian grocery market of the German-based global discount chain Aldi, which specialises in low-cost products at the expense of a wide range. And with any luck, it'll bring with it the resurgence of independent specialist shops such as butchers, delicatessens, and fruit and vegetable shops in its vicinity.

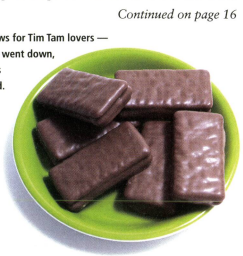
The cheapest and dearest

As in previous surveys, Newcastle again topped the list as the cheapest city for our basket of groceries. At the other end of the scale, in Hobart, it cost on average around $16 more.

Launceston, where groceries cost most in our last two surveys, moved up one place, but still had the single most expensive basket in the survey: at Festival in Prospect, where it cost almost $20 more than at Coles in Wallsend (Newcastle), which had the cheapest basket.

However, one good thing for Launceston grocery shoppers is that prices dropped by more than the average 4%. Other cities that also recorded above-average price drops are Townsville, Canberra, Dubbo,

Continued on page 16



Good news for Tim Tam lovers — the price went down, not up as predicted.

Table 1. Price changes since 1999 and how they compare to ACCC predicted changes

Product (in order of % price change)	Quantity	Actual price change since 1999 (%)	Predicted price change (%) *
Average basket price		-4	
Ski d'Lite yoghurt	400 g	+4	-1
Milk	1 L	+3	-1
Bread, white sliced	680 g	+1	-1
Kraft Singles cheese	12	+1	-1
Sunwhite long-grain rice	2 kg	+1	-1
Dolmio Chunky Bolognese sauce	575 g	0	-1
Heinz tomato sauce	600 mL	0	-1
SPC baked beans	425 g	0	-1
Arnott's Tim Tam biscuits	200 g	-1	+2
CSR/Bundaberg sugar	2 kg	-1	-1
Kellogg's Cornflakes	275 g	-1	-1
McCain frozen peas	500 g	-1	-1
Nescafé coffee	100 g	-1	-1
San Remo spaghetti	500 g	-1	-1
Vegemite	235 g	-1	-1
Goulburn Valley peach slices	825 g	-2	-1
Lipton teabags	100 bags	-2	-1
Sorbent tissues	224 sheets	-2	-3
Thickened cream	300 mL	-2	-1
Bacon	250 g	-3	-1
Butter	250 g	-4	-1
Kleenex toilet rolls (6 x 270 sheets)	1620 sheets	-5	-1 to -2
Cold Power laundry detergent	1 kg	-8	0 to -1
Palmolive dishwashing liquid	500 mL	-8	0 to -1
Pine-O-Cleen disinfectant	500 mL	-8	0 to -1
Coca-Cola	1.25 L	-9	-3 to -7
Go-Cat cat biscuits	1 kg	-9	-1 to -6
Just Juice orange juice	1 L	-9	-9 to -10
Palmolive soap (4 x 125 g)	500 g	-9	-1 to -2
Canola cooking oil	750 mL	-10	-1
Colgate Gel toothpaste	120 g	-10	-1 to -2
Chum canned dog food	1.2 kg	-12	-1 to –6

* As per ACCC guidelines.

Table 1 lists the contents of our basket, the price changes we found in this survey and the pre-GST predictions. However, a few points should be noted when comparing the actual prices and the post-GST changes predicted by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

- **Our comparisons are based on prices obtained in July 2000 and September 1999, so the few and relatively small price rises we found (1–4%) could have occurred between then and July 1 this year, when the new tax system came into force, rather than post-GST.**
- **The ACCC estimates were based on savings related to the new tax system being passed on to the consumer after six months or so.**
- **Factors other than the GST can influence price changes as well, such as seasonal demand. Perhaps it was the popularity of comfort food on cold winter nights that drove the price of Arnott's Tim Tam biscuits down a bit, despite its being the only grocery item in our basket predicted to go up in price.**

Table 2. How the major supermarkets compare, % more or less than average price

Major supermarket (number of stores in the survey in the states where they compete*)	Average 2000 basket price	Compared to overall average
Franklins (28) **(A)**	$69.50	Same as average
Woolworths (32) **(B)**	$69.65	Same as average
Coles (33)	$70.32	1% more expensive

* ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria. To ensure the comparisons are fair, we've excluded states where one or more of these supermarkets don't compete.
(A) Includes Big Fresh, Fresh and No Frills stores.
(B) Includes Safeway.

These products in our basket went up in price, despite being predicted to go down slightly.

ACCC PRICE SURVEY

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) undertook its own national price survey in July and August. The results are published on our price-watch site (www.choicepricewatch.com.au).

The site also includes a database of goods and services, calculators to work out if prices are moving according to guidelines, discussion forums, options for you to register price movements online, and a link to the ACCC complaints page.

Continued from page 15

Wollongong and the Central Coast — the last probably because the Woolworths baskets in Erina and Woy Woy cost 9% less than a year earlier. See Table 3, above right, for more on towns' price changes.

But regardless of location, our basket of groceries this year cost less than last. In some cities the basket even cost less than *two* years ago. There were only three exceptions: at Franklins Fresh in Queanbeyan (NSW) the price rose by 3% and at IGA in Castle Hill (Sydney) and Coles in Preston (Melbourne) by 1%.

As far as state prices are concerned, Canberra's higher-than-average price drop pushed the ACT to first place and South Australia down to second.

The good news products in our basket: they went down in price a good deal more than predicted.

Table 3. Towns ranked by price and price changes since 1999

Rank	City (last survey's rank)	Average basket price	Price change (%)
1	Newcastle (1)	$64.46	-3
2	Central Coast (6)	$67.96	-5
3	Mt Gambier (4)	$69.04	-4
4	Canberra (13)	$69.06	-5
5	Adelaide (3)	$69.13	-3
6	Townsville (17)	$69.56	-6
7	Dubbo (15)	$69.73	-5
8	Gold Coast (8)	$69.98	-3
9	Queanbeyan (2)	$70.12	-1
10	Sydney (9)	$70.14	-3
11	Toowoomba (5)	$70.16	-2
12	Brisbane (7)	$70.29	-3
13	Ballina (10)	$70.57	-3
14	Ballarat (12)	$70.72	-3
15	Bendigo (14)	$71.08	-3
16	Geelong (16)	$71.24	-3
17	Melbourne (11)	$71.27	-2
18	Wollongong (18)	$71.86	-5
19	Darwin (19)	$72.86	-4
20	Perth (21)	$75.00	-3
21	Albany (20)	$75.21	-2
22	Bunbury (22)	$75.34	-4
23	Launceston (24)	$79.79	-6
24	Hobart (23)	$80.73	-3

Our survey

Our buyers hit the shops in late July this year to find out by how much the price for a basket of groceries had come down (or gone up) since our last supermarket price survey in pre-GST September 1999.

We collected prices from 138 supermarkets in 24 cities, mostly the same as last year. The supermarkets were chosen in 'clusters' — competing directly with others located close by.

The basket, too, included most of the things we surveyed last year — things you'd probably buy regularly, such as tea, bread, rice, toothpaste and so on. For a complete list see Table 1 on page 15.

For most items we specified a brand, such as Arnott's Tim Tams or SPC baked beans, but for others, such as milk, butter and bread, we priced the cheapest we found. Fresh meat, fruit and vegetables were excluded, as not all supermarkets sell them and they'd have to be of the same quality for proper price comparison.

We priced the groceries anonymously and gave the shops no warning of our survey, so they couldn't lower their prices artificially.

E-shopping

If you work long hours or would rather spend your time doing other things, grocery shopping via the Internet may help you solve your time problems. So we compared several online supermarket sites with conventional supermarket shopping.

On the same days as we collected prices in 138 supermarkets across the country, we also visited the following online supermarkets and noted the prices and delivery charges quoted. At two sites (Coles Online and Woolworths HomeShop) we had the basket of groceries delivered, to see how the goods arrived and the services compared.

- **Coles Online**: Delivers to certain areas in Melbourne and Sydney (we ordered the basket in both cities). Delivery fee paid: $13.69. Minimum order: $60. www.colesonline.com.au.
- **Woolworths HomeShop**: Delivers to certain areas in Sydney and Canberra (we ordered the basket in Sydney). Delivery fee paid: $12.50. Minimum order: $60. www.woolworths.com.au.
- **ShopFast**: Delivers to metropolitan Sydney only. It's purely online-based and has no conventional stores. Delivery fee: $6.55. No minimum order. www.shopfast.com.au.
- **Goat Tracks**: Delivers to Adelaide suburbs and beyond from various merchants in the area. Delivery fee: $5.50. Minimum order: $25. www.goattracks.com.au
- **Electrolley**: Delivers to metropolitan Perth suburbs. Delivery fee: $7.70–$15.50. No minimum order. www.electrolley.com.au.

A price for convenience

Most of the items we surveyed were on average around 4% more expensive online. However, with the delivery fee added to the bill — it ranged from $5 to $15 — the basket of groceries bought via the Internet cost around 18% more than in conventional supermarkets.

That's quite a steep price to pay, but perhaps it's worth the expense if price is less important to you than the convenience of online shopping.

For the additional price you pay, you don't have to negotiate an unwilling trolley through packed aisles full of people rushing to get their shopping done. You don't have to make time for shopping and wait in supermarket queues.

In fact, at all the sites we visited you can save your shopping list (or several lists) and use it to base your next order on. So you can have a basic list of items you buy regularly, and just add or delete a few items every time you place an order. That could reduce the time you spend shopping — at the computer — even further.

You save on petrol or public transport fares for the trip to the supermarket — unless you walk, in which case you save on shoe soles! And, of course, you can save on impulse buys — lingering smells can no longer tempt you to buy that freshly baked cake or grilled chicken drumstick.

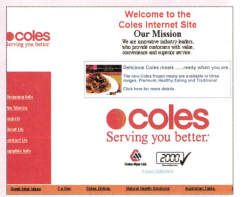
Out of stock

All the goods we ordered from online supermarkets arrived in good condition and were delivered as requested.

Three items in our order from Coles Online were out of stock and substituted, although we hadn't indicated on the order form that we'd like a substitution. However, our home shoppers had a chance to reject it before they paid for it — in each case the person delivering the order checked whether they'd accept the substitution. And in one instance, Coles rang the customer and checked whether they wanted a substitute.

The only other discrepancies in the Coles orders were to the shoppers' benefit. A pack of bacon that was ordered was included but not charged for, and two items were slightly cheaper than quoted.

Woolworths HomeShop didn't charge, or include a substitute, for a can of brand-name fruit it had sold out of, but it substituted a 750 mL for a 500 mL bottle of dishwashing liquid ordered, and charged the price of the 500 mL bottle.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Welcome to the Coles Internet Site
Our Mission
We are innovative industry leaders, who provide customers with value, convenience and superior service.
Delicious Coles meals ... ready when you are.
The new Coles frozen meals are available in three ranges: Premium, Healthy Eating and Traditional.
Click here for more details.
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Food Mag Ideas
Fun Stuff
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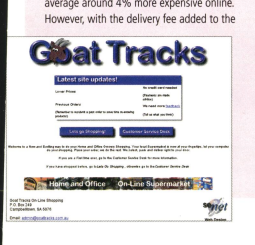

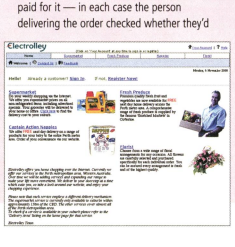
Electrolley
Hello! Already a customer? Sign In. If not, Register here!
Supermarket
Fresh Produce
Captain Action Nappies
Clients
Electrolley offers you home shopping over the Internet. Currently we offer our services to the Perth metropolitan area. Western Australia is the largest state in Australia, covering one third of the land mass but with only one-tenth the population. We deliver to your door step at a time convenient to you. Electrolley is the most convenient way to do your shopping experience.
Please note that each service employs a different delivery mechanism. We request that for your convenience you only proceed to checkout within the same service. Thank you.
To check if your area is available on your selected delivery style as the 'Delivery Area' listing on the home page for that service.
Electrolley Team

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Table 4. How much the basket cost round the country

ADELAIDE, SA

1	Woolworths, Glenelg	$67.20
2	Woolworths, Elizabeth	$67.29
3	Coles, Glenelg	$68.69
4	Bi-Lo, Port Adelaide	$69.04
5	Franklins Fresh, Port Adelaide	$69.24
6	Coles, Port Adelaide	$69.34
7	Coles, Elizabeth	$69.85
8	Franklins No Frills, Elizabeth Park	$70.58
9	Bi-Lo, Glenelg East	$70.89

ALBANY, WA

1	Coles, Albany	$74.38
2	Woolworths, Albany	$76.05

BALLARAT, VIC

1	Coles, Ballarat	$70.20
1	Franklins Fresh, Ballarat	$70.20
3	Safeway, Sebastopol	$71.76

BALLINA, NSW

1	Woolworths, Ballina	$70.07
2	Franklins Fresh, Ballina	$70.43
3	Coles, Ballina	$71.20

BENDIGO, VIC

1	Franklins Fresh, Kangaroo Flat	$70.57
2	Coles, Bendigo	$70.70
3	Bi-Lo, Bendigo	$71.27
4	Safeway, Bendigo	$71.79

BRISBANE, QLD

1	Franklins Fresh, Stafford	$68.64
2	Franklins Fresh, Mt Gravatt	$69.01
3	Franklins Big Fresh, Capalaba	$69.59
4	Woolworths, Capalaba	$69.83
5	Woolworths, Upper Mt Gravatt	$69.93
6	Woolworths, Kenmore	$70.70
7	Woolworths, Stafford	$70.74
8	Bi-Lo, Stafford Heights	$70.99
9	Coles, Upper Mt Gravatt	$71.16
10	Coles, Capalaba	$71.20
11	Coles, Kenmore	$71.42

BUNBURY, WA

1	Coles, Bunbury	$74.32
2	Woolworths, Bunbury	$76.36

CANBERRA, ACT

1	Coles, Tuggeranong	$67.92
2	Woolworths, Tuggeranong	$68.27
3	Coles, Belconnen	$68.69
4	Woolworths, Woden	$69.12
5	Woolworths, Belconnen	$69.77
6	Franklins No Frills, Belconnen	$70.59

CENTRAL COAST, NSW

1	Woolworths, Erina	$64.29
2	Franklins Fresh, Erina	$65.62
3	Franklins No Frills, Woy Woy	$68.23
4	Woolworths, Woy Woy	$69.03
5	Jewel, Erina	$69.91
6	Coles, Woy Woy	$70.65

DARWIN, NT

1	Woolworths, Nightcliff	$70.82
2	Woolworths, Casuarina	$70.98
3	Coles, Casuarina	$74.53
4	Bi-Lo, Casuarina	$75.12

DUBBO, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Dubbo	$69.41
2	Coles, Dubbo	$69.55
3	Woolworths, Dubbo	$70.23

GEELONG, VIC

1	Franklins No Frills, Waurn Ponds	$70.38
2	Franklins Fresh, Corio	$71.12
3	Coles, Belmont	$71.21
4	Bi-Lo, Belmont	$71.25
5	Safeway, Waurn Ponds	$71.57
6	Coles, Corio	$71.91

GOLD COAST, NSW/QLD

1	Franklins Big Fresh, Nerang	$67.73
2	Woolworths, Tweed Heads	$70.32
3	Coles, Nerang	$70.33
4	Bi-Lo, Nerang	$70.46
5	Coles, Tweed Heads	$71.08

HOBART, TAS

1	Coles, Rosny Park	$80.01
2	Purity, Claremont	$80.61
3	Purity, Sandy Bay	$80.75
4	Coles, Sandy Bay	$80.83
5	Purity, Rosny Park	$81.45

LAUNCESTON, TAS

1	Coles, Mowbray	$76.01
2	Roelf Vos, Newnham	$80.16
3	Festival, Prospect	$83.19

MELBOURNE, VIC

1	Franklins Big Fresh, Doncaster	$69.97
2	Safeway, Doncaster	$70.16
3	Franklins No Frills, Werribee	$70.29
4	Coles, Werribee	$70.42
5	Coles, Doncaster	$70.62
6	Coles, Dandenong	$70.99
7	Safeway, Dandenong	$71.09
8	Safeway, Prahran	$71.10
9	Jewel Warehouse Store, Werribee	$71.17
10	Bi-Lo, Werribee	$71.34
11	Safeway, Werribee	$72.02
12	Safeway, Preston	$72.41
13	Coles, Prahran	$72.55
14	Coles, Preston	$73.70

MT GAMBIER, SA

1	Woolworths, Mt Gambier	$67.55
2	Coles, Mt Gambier	$69.04
3	Bi-Lo, Mt Gambier	$70.53

NEWCASTLE, NSW

1	Coles, Wallsend	$63.53
2	Coles, Belmont	$63.62
3	Franklins Big Fresh, Glendale	$63.91
4	Woolworths, Mount Hutton	$64.05
5	Bi-Lo, Belmont	$65.59
6	Bi-Lo, Mount Hutton	$66.07

PERTH, WA

1	Coles, Warwick	$71.97
2	Coles, Subiaco	$72.77
3	Woolworths, Warwick	$73.58
4	Coles, Midland	$74.73
5	Action, East Fremantle	$74.97
6	Action, Midland	$75.06
7	Coles, Fremantle	$75.07
8	Woolworths, Midland	$75.92
9	Woolworths, Subiaco	$76.19
10	Dewsons, South Fremantle	$76.91
11	Farmer Jack's, Midland	$77.85

QUEANBEYAN, NSW

1	Coles, Queanbeyan	$69.33
2	Woolworths, Queanbeyan	$69.77
3	Franklins Fresh, Queanbeyan	$71.26

SYDNEY, NSW

1	Woolworths, Campbelltown	$64.68
2	Woolworths, Leichhardt	$65.29
3	Franklins Big Fresh, Leichhardt	$65.70
4	Franklins Big Fresh, Campbelltown	$67.57
5	Coles, Campbelltown	$68.05
6	Franklins No Frills, Blacktown	$69.48
7	Jewel Warehouse Store, Campbelltown	$70.05
8	Coles, Blacktown	$70.19
9	Coles, Castle Hill	$70.78
10	Franklins No Frills, Hurstville	$70.85
11	Franklins No Frills, Castle Hill	$71.11
12	Coles, Hurstville	$71.18
13	Woolworths, Blacktown	$71.31
14	Woolworths, Neutral Bay	$71.56
15	Coles, Neutral Bay	$72.02
16	Franklins No Frills, Neutral Bay	$72.40
17	Fresco, Hurstville South	$74.70
18	IGA, Castle Hill	$75.57

TOOWOOMBA, QLD

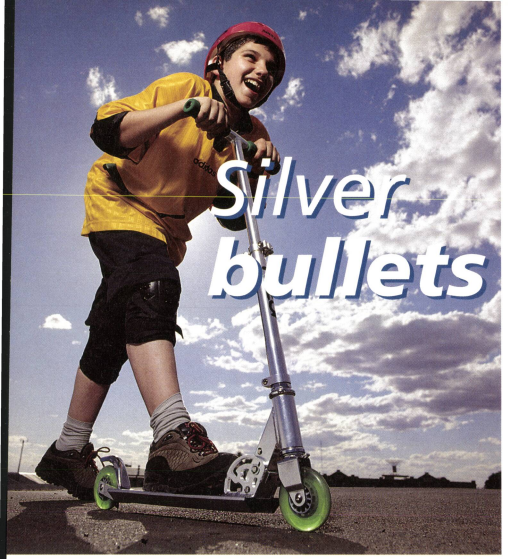
1	Franklins Big Fresh, Toowoomba	$69.68
2	Coles, Toowoomba	$70.32
3	Woolworths, Wilsonton	$70.47

TOWNSVILLE-AITKENVALE, QLD

1	Coles, Aitkenvale	$68.22
2	Woolworths, Aitkenvale	$69.91
3	Franklins Fresh, Aitkenvale	$70.54

WOLLONGONG, NSW

1	Franklins No Frills, Wollongong	$70.46
2	Coles, Corrimal	$71.10
3	Woolworths, Corrimal	$71.49
4	Woolworths, Wollongong	$71.54
5	Wollongong Food Barn, Wollongong	$74.72



Silver bullets

Fast, sleek and usually silver, those little fold-up scooters you see zipping all over town are bound to feature on quite a few Christmas wish lists this year. But the rapidly mounting injuries reveal another more dangerous side to these toys.

IN BRIEF

- Are these scooters safe? It depends. There have been injuries resulting from both defective products and reckless riding.
- CHOICE supports the proposed introduction of an Australian Standard for scooter safety. This is likely to encompass product design and construction, as well as recommendations for safe riding such as wearing a helmet, knee pads and elbow guards.
- Of the seven models in this test, some were easier to assemble and ride than others, but in our tests they were all pretty similar in terms of strength, safety and durability — at least when used as recommended.

ISN'T IT GREAT TO SEE A FAD that gets kids outside and active, rather than glued to the computer screen, hunched over electronic games or spending a small fortune collecting plastic discs with Japanese cartoon characters on them?

And it's not just kids who are into scooters: teenagers are pushing them to the limits, trying out the kind of stunts no parent would ever care to witness. Even adults use them for getting around town, or riding them to the train station or bus stop. Their compact size and light weight means they're easy to carry, and they can be slipped away under the desk or in a cupboard when you get to work.

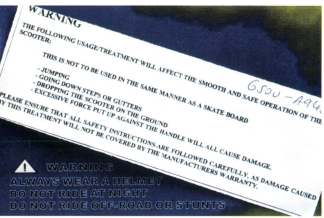
But despite being fun and practical, scooters are now hitting the headlines for more sinister reasons: poor-quality or faulty products and reckless riding resulting in accidents and injuries. With consumer and health lobby groups crying out for greater awareness of the risks involved, Standards Australia has launched an investigation into scooter safety with the view to putting together a standard for design, construction and safe usage.

What are the safety issues?

In the US almost 10,000 people — mostly kids — have turned up in hospital this year with injuries sustained in scooter accidents. While the accident figures for Australia, with its smaller population, number in the hundreds rather than thousands, child safety organisation Kidsafe is very concerned about the high number of scooter-related injuries.

So why is it that scooters are considered so dangerous, even when compared with similar recreational 'transportation' like inline skates, skateboards and bicycles?

- Their small, hard wheels make them extremely vulnerable to bumps and cracks in the path.
- Kidsafe reckons that the brakes on some models, particularly the cheaper ones, are inadequate at higher speeds, and kids may not have the weight and strength to apply them. Furthermore, scooters can go quite fast (up to 30 km/h), and younger kids may not have the same ability and experience as adults to spot potential dangers, nor the physical skills required to avoid them (such as braking and turning simultaneously).


WARNING
THE FOLLOWING USAGE/TREATMENT WILL AFFECT THE SMOOTH AND SAFE OPERATION OF THE SCOOTER.
- THIS IS NOT TO BE USED IN THE SAME MANNER AS A SKATE BOARD
- JUMPING DOWN STEPS OR GUTTERS
- RIDING THE SCOOTER ON THE GROUND
- DROPPING THE SCOOTER AGAINST THE HANDLE WILL ALL CAUSE DAMAGE.
- EXCESSIVE FORCE PUT UP AGAINST THE HANDLE WILL ALL CAUSE DAMAGE.
PLEASE ENSURE THAT ALL SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS ARE FOLLOWED CAREFULLY AS DAMAGE CAUSED BY THIS TREATMENT WILL NOT BE COVERED BY THE MANUFACTURERS WARRANTY.
WARNING
ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET
DO NOT RIDE AT NIGHT
DO NOT RIDE OFF-ROAD OR STUNTS

Disclaimers like this are a bit of a cop-out. In real life kids *are* going to jump scooters and do stunts, so the scooters should be designed to cope.

OUCH!

Don't scoot without shoes! A young girl had her big toe almost completely severed when it got caught between the brake/mudguard and the wheel.

■ There have been a number of complaints relating to problems with the scooters' construction and design, including handlebars collapsing, the steering shaft snapping or working loose at the joint, screws and rivets falling out, wheels and the braking mechanism coming free, and clamps failing to keep the footboard and handlebars in place. These problems may be the result of a faulty product, incorrect assembly or wear and tear.

■ Finally, and not surprisingly, injuries can occur when riders attempt stunts. Unlike cyclists and inline skaters, scooter riders tend not to wear protective gear like helmets, elbow guards and knee pads. Furthermore, some manufacturers say the scooters aren't designed for this kind of riding, which may result in problems like those listed above.

Are some scooters safer than others?

Unfortunately, we can't answer with absolute certainty. When we checked safety aspects and durability for seven scooters (see *The CHOICE tests*, page 22) we couldn't make any of them fail. Yet one of the models we tested, **SOUTH BEACH**, has been the subject of a number of complaints from consumers, with reports of parts breaking or falling off.

Our test results may well be because we tested and rode them according to their intended use, as suggested by some manufacturers — but use involving high-impact jumps and stunts might create greater risks. It's been argued that problems arise from riders 'abusing' the scooters, rather than problems with the scooters' quality.

Most of the models we tested were at the more expensive end of the range. These days there are plenty of cheaper models available for under $100 — even as little as $50 — and it's the quality of these models that authorities are concerned about. In particular, parents are being warned not to buy these cheaper models for their children.

Reducing the risks

There's no doubt that scooters provide some exercise, are fun to use and useful for getting around, and we don't want to put a wet blanket on their use. But by introducing a few basic measures, we think riding scooters could be made markedly safer:

■ **An Australian standard for product quality and safe use.** This will help people choose a safer, better-quality scooter, and increase rider compliance with safer scooting behaviour.

■ **Design and construction quality that can cope with real-life use, including jumps, stunts and other rough treatment.** CHOICE thinks manufacturers are simply copping out by including disclaimers against this sort of riding (see the photo, left, for some examples).

■ **Compulsory use of helmets, with knee and elbow pads highly recommended.** While most of the injuries recorded so far involve fractures, cuts and abrasions, there have been several head injuries resulting in brain damage — something helmets can help prevent.

Road rules

At the time of writing, this type of scooter falls under the 'bicycle' category in the Australian Road Rules when used by people **12 years and older**. Theoretically, then, riders are subject to the same laws as cyclists: they mustn't ride on a footpath (unless accompanying a child), and all riders must wear a helmet. Yeah, right!

This designation was made a long time before scooters became so popular, and the national roads and traffic authorities are now considering reclassifying them as 'wheeled recreational devices' (the category that also includes inline skates and skateboards). In this case, it would be legal to use the footpath, keeping to the left and giving way to pedestrians. As with skateboards and inline skates, there may be some limitations to this: for example, local councils may ban their use on certain paths.

Roads and traffic authorities will decide on this reclassification after we go to press, but we'll report their decision on our website: go to the *Leisure and travel* section of the *Products* area of www.choice.com.au. We'll also print an update in an upcoming issue of CHOICE.

When used by **under 12s**, these scooters fall into the 'wheeled toy', category, and are subject to the same laws as recreational devices. However, in light of recent negative publicity about scooter-related injuries, it's possible that children will soon be legally required to wear helmets. We'll keep you updated on our website — see the details above.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

■ Make sure handlebars are high enough for you — taller people may find some models have a greater maximum extension than others. All the models we tested have a bolt with a clamp you loosen and tighten to change the height — make sure the bolt is easy to grip and turn, so you can clamp the handlebar stem securely.

■ The handlebars should lock securely in place. There have been a number of complaints about handlebars collapsing, which could be due to user error (not snapping them fully in place) or parts failure (where the locking pins don't hold). Test them out in the shop by wriggling them around and trying to force them in or pull them out of their sockets. The handles of most scooters we looked at stopped at a certain point, but some went in too far, so the locking pin wasn't activated.

■ The grips should be padded and not able to slip round the metal bars. Make sure the caps or guards at the ends of the handlebars are securely fitted.

■ Minimal protrusions and smooth edges and welding seams.

■ Welded construction. One of the problems with cheaper models is that they're a mixture of aluminium and steel parts, with bolts or rivets holding the components together. The steel bolts or rivets, which are harder than the aluminium base, can work loose, compromising the strength and stability of the structure — or fall out altogether so bits come apart. Welded metal gives a stronger construction, less prone to failure (but then some welds are better than others …)

■ A brake that's easy to operate, and that you're also unlikely to get your foot caught under. Our trialists found that the brakes/mudguards with a textured surface or platform were easier to operate.

■ A scooter that feels well-balanced, gives a smooth ride and doesn't wobble a lot. There are now models with suspension, but as we haven't tested them, we can't comment on them.

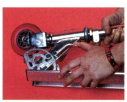
■ The surface area of the brake pad is a major factor in the effectiveness of the brakes. The brakes of most scooters consist of the rear mudguard, whose curvature allows good surface contact.

■ Check that the edge of the board isn't sharp — sometimes when you jump off, the scooter will swing around and hit you on the leg.

■ Wheels and bearings that can be easily replaced (check whether replacements are available). Worn or damaged ones could cause accidents, and skidding stops on a rough surface will quickly eat the plastic wheels away.

■ The footboard should have a non-slip surface.

■ The greater the ground clearance, the easier it will be to negotiate changes in the level of the path and going onto and off ramps. Even minor changes in the slope of a path can bring some scooters to an abrupt halt.



■ A folding hinge that locks securely in place and is easy to operate. Try it in the shop.

■ There wasn't a great deal of difference in the size of the footboards we tested, but some people felt that certain models were a little too short — try it out in the shop.

■ So far it's the cheaper scooters — those costing under $100 — that are causing the majority of complaints. While we can't guarantee that all those over the magic $100 cut-off are safer, be aware that if the price seems too good to be true, it probably is. By the time you buy all the necessary protective gear (if you don't already have it), the whole exercise could be quite expensive — but don't compromise on safety.

■ Buy your scooter from a bicycle or skate shop where you get personal attention and advice from someone who knows what they're talking about. This will not only increase your chances of getting a good-quality scooter, but they can show you how to assemble it properly and ride it safely. If you're buying for kids, they can also advise on the appropriate height for the handlebars.

The CHOICE tests

We tested seven widely available models for durability, looked at safety aspects and how easy they were to assemble and fold up, and what they were like to ride.

These seven accounted for about half the brands on the market when we bought them, but since then the market has exploded, with around 100 models available.

Most of the latest influx, according to retailers we spoke to, are cheaper copies of the original brands — and these cheapies are the ones authorities are most concerned about. Unfortunately they hit the market too late to be included in our tests, but we've provided some tips to help you pick out the better ones (see *What to look for*, page 21).

Durability and safety

The main test consisted of repeatedly pushing the handlebars back and forth with a lot of force, to see if frequent and severe acceleration and braking would weaken the steering shaft. All models passed with only minor wear and tear evident in the joints and bearings.

But just because there wasn't much difference among the brands tested, this finding can't be generalised to the whole market, especially since we tested the more expensive end of the market. Secondly, we only simulated the kind of use for which the scooters were claimed to be originally designed — so we can't really say whether they'd stand up to stunts like X-up, deck slide grind or pop tail shove-it (and before you ask, we don't know either …).

We also looked at potential hazards like getting fingers trapped in moving parts while assembling and disassembling the scooters. All models had some risks, and we advise parents to show your kids how to assemble them safely, and supervise them a few times.

Test ride

So, that was the hard work — now for the fun bit: the test ride! After assembling the scooters, our eager CHOICE trialists took them for a spin around the park, up and down hills, around corners and through a slalom course. The surfaces included asphalt and pebblecrete.

This user trial is where the main differences between brands became apparent, and on this basis, we'd recommend the **RAZOR MS-130** — the original of this type of scooter — and **M-CRO**, which came out equal best in our user tests.

WHAT TO BUY

M-CRO SKATE	$199
RAZOR MS-130	$218

These are the best of the scooters tested, based on the results of the user trial. Our lab tests didn't show great differences in durability — but we tested according to manufacturer recommendations for how scooters are supposed to be used. So we didn't jump them or do stunts (unlike some real-life users); future tests that treat scooters like that might tell a different story.

Another option, if you're looking for a cheaper model, is **THE BLADE**, which rated well in our user trial, although not as well as the models in the *What to buy* list.

See above for more info on the current scooter market and the tests.

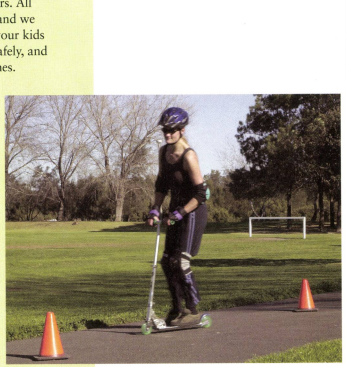
PROFILES

The scooters are profiled

VANESSA MARSHALL

M-CRO SKATE

Price paid: $199.
Weight: 2.7 kg.
Footboard: 33 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 58–90 cm.
Ground clearance: 25 mm.
Construction: Welded.
Instructions: Very poor (none provided).
Trialists' comments: Rode evenly and smoothly and maintained speed. Very manoeuvrable and good for going up and down hills. It's also easy to assemble and disassemble.
Performance verdict: Very good.



No stunts, but our trialists took the scooters on a slalom course, round corners and up and down hills, and over different surfaces.

om left to right, based on trialists' overall performance verdicts. All the trialists were adults. Prices shown are the prices we paid when we bought the scooters in July 2000.

VANESSA MARSHALL

RAZOR MS-130

Price paid: $218.
Weight: 2.8 kg.
Footboard: 33 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 58–90 cm.
Ground clearance: 22 mm.
Construction: Welded.
Instructions: Good.
Trialists' comments: Rode evenly and smoothly and maintained speed. It was a little bumpy on pebblecrete, but otherwise highly rated.
Performance verdict: Very good.

VANESSA MARSHALL

RACER 2000

Price paid: $245.
Weight: 2.9 kg.
Footboard: 32 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 59–92 cm.
Ground clearance: 29 mm.
Construction: Welded.
Instructions: Good.
Trialists' commemnts: Performed well on pebblecrete; brakes are effective and easy to use; and it's easy to assemble.
Performance verdict: Good.

VANESSA MARSHALL

THE BLADE

Price paid: $133.
Weight: 2.9 kg.
Footboard: 33 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 59–91 cm.
Ground clearance: 30 mm.
Construction: Welded.
Instructions: Good.
Trialists' comments: Performed well on pebblecrete; brakes are effective and easy to use.
Performance verdict: Good.

VANESSA MARSHALL

SOUTH BEACH MINI

Price paid: $90.
Weight: 3.6 kg.
Footboard: 36 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 60–94 cm.
Ground clearance: 27 mm.
Construction: Bolted steel and aluminium parts.
Instructions: Very good.
Trialists' comments: Good when going up and down hills. The brakes are easy to use and it performed well on pebblecrete. However, it was relatively heavy and awkward to carry (even though it came with a carry bag) and difficult to assemble and fold up. Of particular concern was that it was difficult to insert the handles securely — handle failure is one of the main complaints fair trading departments have received about this model.
Performance verdict: OK.

VANESSA MARSHALL

ACTION BOY

Price paid: $219.
Weight: 2.8 kg.
Footboard: 33 x 10 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 58–88 cm.
Ground clearance: 17 mm.
Construction: Welded.
Instructions: OK.
Trialists' comments: The handlebars felt slightly too short, and the brakes were somewhat difficult to use and not very effective. The scooter felt wobbly and unstable to ride, and a few people found that the front wheel lifted while riding.
Performance verdict: Borderline.

VANESSA MARSHALL

LASER PED

Price paid: $239.
Weight: 3.2 kg.
Footboard: 32 x 9 cm.
Handlebars (height range): 57–91 cm.
Ground clearance: 33 mm.
Construction: Part welded, part bolted aluminium and steel.
Instructions: Very poor (none provided).
Trialists' comments: The handlebars felt slightly too short, and the brakes were somewhat difficult to use and not very effective. The scooter felt wobbly and unstable to ride, the wheels didn't glide very well and it wasn't as fast as the others.
Performance verdict: Borderline.

Annual buying guide

Here's a round-up of what we tested and trialled in 2000. If you want to buy a gift for Christmas or be ready for the January sales, have a look here.

AND IN THIS ISSUE...

... take a look at our test reports on gas trolley barbecues, ice cream makers, scooters and shiraz.

IN BRIEF

- Models can change during the year, so you may find new ones in the shops that we haven't tested. A recommendation here means a model is still available and we think you'll be satisfied with its performance, though it mightn't have all the latest features.
- Prices quoted are a good target to aim for when you're shopping around. Some are based on nationwide checks in August to October 2000, others are recommended retail. A few are the price we found in one store.
- If you want more information about any of these products, consult the original article.
- If you're a new subscriber and don't have all the back copies of CHOICE 2000, you can get a reasonable number of back issues free of charge. Phone CHOICE Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 and have your subscriber number handy. If you're a CHOICE Online subscriber you can also find the articles and test results there.

Kitchen

Blenders

(May 2000)

Summer just cries out for exotic fruit frappés or an exquisitely cool cocktail to wind down with at the end of a hot day. All the blenders tested are good for blending soup and soft foods. What differentiated them is their ability to deal with hard vegies and to crush ice. These models dealt well with both.

- **In a nutshell:** The PHILIPS is easily the best of this bunch for ease of use. It and the MISTRAL, MOULINEX Y45, SUNBEAM and KENWOOD BL311 have a light and stable plastic jug that locks into place. The jug with the KENWOOD BL300T doesn't lock into place, but it has cord storage.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	MISTRAL BL50 Mix n Blend	$55
	KENWOOD BL300T	$51
	MOULINEX Y45 Vitamix	$70
	SUNBEAM Supersize PB070	$60
	MAXIM BL-400 BEST BUY	$40
equal	KENWOOD BL311	$70
	MOULINEX W36 Power Blender	$80
	PHILIPS HR1700 Twist	$50

Ceramic cooktops

(March 2000)

All the ceramic cooktops tested cooked well and were fairly easy to use. But don't spend extra for a halogen element — it didn't cook any better than a regular ceramic radiant element.

■ **In a nutshell:** The **SIMPSON** is the easiest to use and doesn't have any cracks where dirt and grease can accumulate. The **SMEG** has very good temperature control and responsiveness. The **KLEENMAID** also has good temperature control and responsiveness and, like the **SIMPSON**, there aren't any dirt-catching grooves. The **WESTINGHOUSE** has a dual element that lets you use a large or small saucepan without wasting heat, and its control panel can be installed to the left or right of the cooktop. The control knobs on the **WHIRLPOOL** have a comfortable grip and are easy to use, and it has clear and easy-to-read instructions.

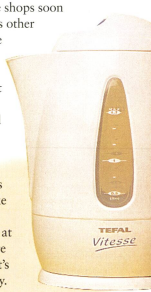
WHAT TO BUY

SIMPSON 64C985U	BEST BUY	$700
SMEG SA 604W		$940
KLEENMAID CH16		$1099
WESTINGHOUSE PHHYS64W		$1000
WHIRLPOOL 64KM613 WH		$860

Kettles

(March 2000)

If you're tired of boiling kettles dry on the stove or don't want to get caught in a gas shortage (like they did in Victoria last year — and the shops soon ran out of electric kettles as well as other electric goods!), you'll probably be sizing up an electric kettle.



■ **In a nutshell:** All three of these have dual water windows for right or left-handed use, are easy to fill through the spout, pour easily and have auto boil off and boil-dry protection. The **TEFAL** was the easiest to use. The **SUNBEAM KE3860** has a spout cover, which is useful for keeping little critters (like cockies) out of the kettle. The **SUNBEAM KE3560** was the fastest at boiling a litre of water — but we're talking only seconds here — and it's the best for people with a disability.

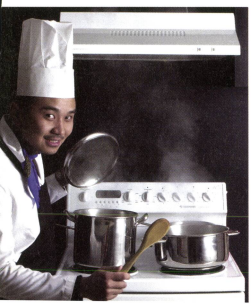
WHAT TO BUY

TEFAL Vitesse	$71
SUNBEAM KE3560 Quantum	$60
SUNBEAM KE3860 Quantum Plus	$75

Rangehoods

(October 2000)

If someone in your household likes kippers for breakfast, you'll definitely want a rangehood to suck away that unmistakable fragrance. You can get retractable models (where you just pull out the hood when you want to use it) or fixed ones. We tested them in both ducted and recirculating modes; generally you'll get better performance if you can duct your rangehood to the outside rather than have it recirculating the air.



■ **In a nutshell:** The **ROBINHOOD, FISHER & PAYKEL** and **SIMPSON** (all fixed hoods) were very good at steam extraction in ducted mode, and good in recirculating mode; their filters are easy to access but large and fiddly to clean; and their exteriors are easy to clean. The **SIMPSON** is the quietest of the three.

Both **WHIRLPOOL**s, the **CHEF** and the **SMEG** were better than all the other models for steam extraction in recirculating mode; they were good in ducted mode too. The **WHIRLPOOL AKR 628/WH** (a fixed hood) has a filter that's easy to access but large and fiddly to clean; the exterior is easy to clean. The **WHIRLPOOL AKR 630/WH** is a retractable hood; it's difficult to clean the exterior and its glass panel is fixed, so it can't be easily or completely cleaned. The **CHEF** (retractable) has comparatively low power consumption, and its filter is easy to access and clean. Its glass panel can be removed for cleaning. The **SMEG** is retractable; its filters are easy to remove and clean, though a bit fiddly to replace.

WHAT TO BUY

	DUCTED		
	ROBINHOOD RA6WH	BEST BUY	$99
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL RH600**		$239
equal	**SIMPSON RCN6W*11**		$159
	RECIRCULATING		
	WHIRLPOOL AKR 628/WH		$229
	WHIRLPOOL AKR 630/WH		$299
equal	**CHEF RR3C61BL**		$350
equal	**SMEG SA 480T**		$359

Home comforts

Fan heaters

(May 2000)

OK, so it's summer and parliament's not sitting, so you're not that interested in hot air. But you will be come winter. We tested quite a range of small fan heaters this year.

■ **In a nutshell:** The models in the *What to buy* list are all uprights and can also be used as cooling fans. All the **EWTs** in this list have a frost-watch feature, which automatically turns the heater on when the ambient temperature drops below a certain level (usually a rather frosty 5°C). The **MISTRAL** was the quietest in the test and has an audible heat-up alarm if it overheats. Of all the models the **DIMPLEX** had the lowest temperature of its front grille and air outlet.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	**EWT Clima 343 TS**	$45
	MISTRAL MFH 40	$50
	EWT Clima 584 TLS	$79
	EWT Clima 544 TLS	$55
equal	**EWT Clima 383 TS**	$70
	DIMPLEX EF9	$45

Handheld vacs

(July 2000)

If you're sick of battling sand and dog hair all over the car, one of these might be an appropriate filler for the Christmas stocking.

■ **In a nutshell:** Both of these models were among the best performers in the test. The **RONSON** was also the top scorer for ease of use: the dirt receptacle

WHAT TO BUY

equal	**RONSON Dustboss 8216** BEST BUY	$50
	SHOP VAC Wet & Dry 144	$79

Irons

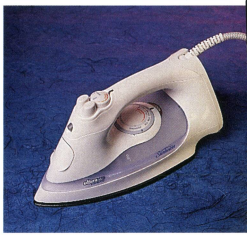
(June 2000)

If you wear a lot of linen or silk, there's no way round it: you've got a lot of ironing to do. Or if you've had to bundle the curtains away while you paint the room, you'll be pretty chuffed if the iron works in the vertical position.

■ **In a nutshell:** The **SUNBEAM Ultura** has vertical steam, and triumphed at ironing cotton, denim, linen and synthetics. The **Pro-steam** was the easiest to use, pretty good (second best, in fact) on linen and has a power-on light.

WHAT TO BUY

Sunbeam Ultura 5500 Silverstone SR5500	$72
Sunbeam Pro-steam 1300 SR1300	$62



Evaporative air coolers

(November 2000)

If that dry heat gets to you, one of these could be just what you need. We tested seven and the two listed below clearly came out on top.

■ **In a nutshell:** They have a different wetting medium from the rest in the test — it's shredded wood — and an axial fan system.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	**BONAIRE Maxicooler**	$279
	CONVAIR Millenia Mi AUS	$319

Bathroom scales

(April 2000)

Maybe you're just watching that perfect weight; or maybe you want to monitor the effects of a good Christmas season. Either way, one of these will help.

■ **In a nutshell:** They've both got a fairly large digital display (so you can't mistake that '8' for a '3', unfortunately). The **SOEHNLE** has an automatic zero adjustment, and the **SCALEMAN** is easily adjusted to zero by tapping on the centre of the scales. The latter is rather more expensive, but its design is flashier (see left).

WHAT TO BUY

SCALEMAN Lithium Powered Glass Electronic TBSC	$153
SOEHNLE 7505	$119

is very easy to remove and replace, and the cleaner is easy to remove from and replace on the wall bracket. The **SHOP VAC** is also very easy to use, and worked well at picking up wet spills (like that spilled bowl of breakfast cereal).

Vacuum cleaners

(July 2000)

Cheaper vacuum cleaners, like these, can be just as effective as high-priced models. Uprights generally perform better, but barrel types can be more convenient to use and store.

WHAT TO BUY

UPRIGHT	
AIRFLO 2100	$220
BARREL	
PANASONIC MC-4860	$180
VOLTA U1015 Rolfy	$175

■ **In a nutshell:** The **AIRFLO** was best at dirt removal, but its cleaning head is too high to reach under low furniture easily — you'll have to stop and change to one of its attachments for that. It has a good range of tools and moves easily over carpet. There's not much between the **PANASONIC** and the **VOLTA**. The former has a better range of onboard tools and can be used as a blower (to pump up the camping mattress, for example), but it's heavier than the **VOLTA**.

Clothes dryers

(May 2000)

This test looked at both timer and auto-sensing dryers. It found auto-sensing dryers can overdry clothes, which can damage them. With a timer dryer you're best to set it for a short time and keep checking.

■ **In a nutshell:** The two **FISHER & PAYKEL**s are only mediocre for energy efficiency, but the others are good. The filter is easy to access and clean on all of them except the **SIMPSON Sirocco 500** (it's at the back of its drum). All except the **HOOVER 5030D** have reverse tumbling, which helps minimise tangling and dries more evenly. The two **F&P**s are the most suitable for people with a disability, particularly their controls and filter access.

WHAT TO BUY

TIMER DRYERS	
KLEENMAID KED 300	$799
HOOVER 5030D BEST BUY	$359
SIMPSON Sirocco 500	$400
AUTO-SENSING DRYERS	
FISHER & PAYKEL ED55-U	$430
FISHER & PAYKEL ED56-U	$460

equal

Washing machines up to $1200

(January/February 2000)

Our net caught 49 washing machines this time, both top and front loaders of varying capacities. They performed similarly within their category (top or front loader), so we looked at purchase price and running costs to produce this list.

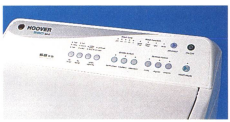
■ **In a nutshell:**

■ The **front-loading GE** is particularly energy and water-efficient, with a very good dirt removal score. The **WHIRLPOOL AWM 285** rated best overall and is one of the cheaper front loaders to buy and run. The **WHIRLPOOL AWM 293** removes dirt well and heats its own water, but didn't score that well for spin efficiency.

■ Of the **small top loaders**, the two **HOOVER 550**s scored relatively well overall and are cheaper to run than the other small top loaders. The **HOOVER 500M** is cheap to buy and performed well overall. The **SIMPSON Esprit** removes dirt and spins efficiently, but isn't so good for water efficiency and gentleness to clothes.

■ The two **medium top loaders**, **HOOVER Boss 650L** and **WHIRLPOOL**, aren't particularly water or energy-efficient, but they both scored well for dirt removal. However, the **HOOVER Boss** isn't as gentle on fabric as the **WHIRLPOOL**.

■ The two **large top-loading HOOVER Boss** machines are water-efficient, and scored well for dirt removal. The **800RL** is the cheapest to run of its size. The **750L** is rather hard on fabric.



WHAT TO BUY

FRONT LOADER (claimed capacity: 5 kg)	
WHIRLPOOL AWM 285	$849
GE WWH6104	$770
WHIRLPOOL AWM 293	$1049
TOP LOADERS	
Small (claimed capacity: 4.5–5.5 kg)	
HOOVER 550EM*	$600
HOOVER 550M*	$600
HOOVER 500M*	$560
SIMPSON Esprit 365550J	$878
Medium (claimed capacity: 6–7 kg)	
HOOVER Boss 650L*	$700
WHIRLPOOL 6LBR6245EQ	$900
Large (claimed capacity: over 7 kg)	
HOOVER Boss 750L*	$800
HOOVER Boss 800RL*	$900

* The Hoover models have been discontinued but you may find them in shops.

Gardens & DIY

Garden watering kits

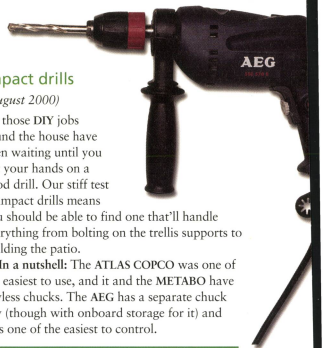
(September 2000)

If you're planning to go away for a while, you're probably relying on a kind friend to water your garden. To make it easier for them (and for you, come to that) you could put in a garden watering kit.

■ **In a nutshell:** The ones we tested are basically starter kits because they'll only cover a small garden. But they're pretty simple and easy to add to, and there are different models for different purposes: beds hugging the garden path, your hanging gardens of Babylon, or the lawn.

WHAT TO BUY

GARDEN SPRAY	
GARDENER'S CHOICE Spray watering kit 21-771-460	$19.70
HANGING SPRAY	
POPE BY TORO Hanging baskets kit 0257	$28.60
DRIP	
GARDENER'S CHOICE Drip watering kit 21-771-354	$19.70
POP-UP/LAWN SPRAY	
POPE BY TORO Lawn pop-up kit 0259	$28.60



Impact drills

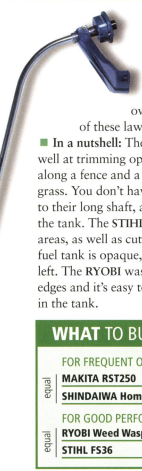
(August 2000)

All those DIY jobs round the house have been waiting until you got your hands on a good drill. Our stiff test of impact drills means you should be able to find one that'll handle everything from bolting on the trellis supports to building the patio.

■ **In a nutshell:** The ATLAS COPCO was one of the easiest to use, and it and the METABO have keyless chucks. The AEG has a separate chuck key (though with onboard storage for it) and was one of the easiest to control.

WHAT TO BUY

ATLAS COPCO PDE 13 RQ	$235
METABO Sb E 600 R+L	$237
AEG SBE 500 R BEST BUY	$144



Lawn trimmers

(November 2000)

Whether your garden is well maintained and tidy or an overgrown mess, you could find one of these lawn trimmers useful.

■ **In a nutshell:** The MAKITA and SHINDAIWA did well at trimming open areas (like a small lawn) and along a fence and a path, as well as slashing long grass. You don't have to stoop much using them due to their long shaft, and it's easy to see the fuel level in the tank. The STIHL also did well at trimming open areas, as well as cutting thick overgrown edges; but its fuel tank is opaque, so it's not easy to see how much is left. The RYOBI was good at cutting thick overgrown edges and it's easy to respool and to see the fuel level in the tank.

WHAT TO BUY

	FOR FREQUENT OR HEAVY-DUTY USE	
equal	**MAKITA RST250**	$334
	SHINDAIWA Home Pro 22F	$352
	FOR GOOD PERFORMANCE AT A CHEAPER PRICE	
equal	**RYOBI Weed Wasp RWT285DS**	$205
	STIHL FS36	$245

Personal & lifestyle

Moisturisers

(April 2000)

If you've been in the sun all day (wearing sunblock, of course), you'll want a refreshing shower and to slather on some moisturiser. Trialists checked out 48 well-known brands to find some bargains and some, well, others…

■ **In a nutshell:** The **LANCÔME** came top with our trialists — and top for price, too; it also got the best score for absorption. **PONDS** is one of the cheapest that our trialists rated highly. **ST IVES** is similarly one of the cheapest, and rated highly for texture. **THE BODY SHOP** got a very high rating for texture, while **L'OREAL** had one of the better absorption ratings.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	**LANCÔME Hydra Zen Skin De-Stressing Hydration**		$78 / 50 mL
	PONDS Daily Moisturising Lotion	BEST BUY	$8 / 150 mL
equal	**ST IVES Swiss Formula Collagen Elastin Essential Moisturiser**	BEST BUY	$7 / 150 mL
	THE BODY SHOP Vitamin E Moisture Cream		$16 / 50 mL
	L'OREAL Plenitude Futur-E Regular		$14 / 120 mL

Binoculars

(June 2000)

Wish you'd had a pair of these for the Olympics? Well, stick a Post-it note on the fridge to remind that certain someone to buy you a pair for Christmas, so you can watch the cricket up close.

■ **In a nutshell:** Both **PENTAX** models and the **MINOLTA Activa Pocket** are suitable for people who wear glasses; the field of view is unaffected. The **MINOLTA Activa Compact** got the best score in the optical tests, having excellent light transmission and very good collimation (which means the image field viewed through each tube is the same, to prevent eyestrain, headaches or double images). The **CANON Compact** is easy to focus and very smooth and comfortable to hold. The **TASCO** is the lightest (and cheapest) of these models, and has one of the widest fields of view at 1000 m, as does the **OLYMPUS**, which also has very good collimation.

WHAT TO BUY

	PENTAX 8 x 24 UCFG*		$150
	MINOLTA Activa Compact 8 x 25		$250
equal	**CANON Compact 8 x 22A**		$200
equal	**TASCO 165 RB-8 x 21**	BEST BUY	$40
	MINOLTA Activa Pocket 8 x 25WP*		$259
	PENTAX 8 x 22 DCFMC*		$230
	OLYMPUS 8 x 24PCIIR		$200

*Suitable for people who wear glasses.

Mobile phones

(January/February 2000)

The really difficult bit is finding the right call plan. But it's still worth knowing what the phones offer you too.

■ **In a nutshell:** The **ERICSSON T18s** has excellent sensitivity (it can make and maintain connections well under poor reception conditions), but comparatively short standby time. It has a voice-dial function, allowing you to dial a number by saying the name of the person you want to call.

The **MOTOROLA L7089** also has a voice-dial function and very long standby time, but a relatively poor instruction manual.

The **ALCATEL One Touch Easy db** has excellent sound quality and sensitivity. It can use AAA batteries, which is helpful if you can't recharge the regular battery.

The **ERICSSON T28s** has a voice-dial function and is very light. Its battery was one of the weakest for both standby time and in use, and the phone broke in our tumble test.

The **SAMSUNG SGH-600** has a voice-dial function, and its daily functions are very easy to use, but it has a relatively short standby time.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	**ERICSSON T18s**		$504
	MOTOROLA L7089		$699
	ALCATEL One Touch Easy db	BEST BUY	$299
equal	**ERICSSON T28s**		$703
equal	**SAMSUNG SGH-600**		$599

On the go

Layback strollers

(August 2000)

A layback stroller may be just the answer if your child is in that in-between baby and toddler stage. They combine the best of both worlds: lying down or sitting up.

■ **In a nutshell:** These all passed the safety aspects of the voluntary Australian standard for prams and strollers. Both the **CHILDCARE Country Shopper** and **BABYCO/SWALLOW Apollo** have boot covers to keep feet warm and dry. The **CHILDCARE** has a back pocket, a viewing window on the top of the hood (which is what trialists preferred) and five hood positions. The **BABYCO/SWALLOW** has a reversible handle, and its viewing window is on the back of the hood.

The **ANP Pathfinder (Jogger)** is a three-wheeler that may suit you if you'd like to take junior with you when you jog. It has a back pocket, a hand-operated front-wheel brake easily accessible on the handlebar and linked rear brakes. There are no shock absorbers, so it can be a bit bumpy for the child; the front wheel doesn't swivel and the leg support isn't adjustable.

WHAT TO BUY

CHILDCARE Country Shopper CC2007DL	$197
BABYCO/SWALLOW Apollo 00928216	$240
ANP Pathfinder (Jogger)	$259

Child car restraints

(September 2000)

The Australian standard for child restraints is considered the most stringent in the world, and that's the kind of reassurance you want when looking for one of these. All restraints on sale meet the standard's requirements, but this test showed which models offer additional safety.

There are several kinds: rear-facing baby restraints; forward-facing child seats (for children weighing 9–18 kg); convertibles (which can be changed from rear-facing baby restraints to forward-facing seats); and booster seats for older children.

■ **In a nutshell:** The **SAFE-N-SOUND Discovery Plus** forward-facing child seat is easy to install and use and has a good range of harness adjustments. In frontal crash tests it allowed more forward head movement than other models.

The **SAFE-N-SOUND Galaxy** convertible has acceptable crash protection in forward-facing mode for a child as well as in baby mode; and it's easy to convert from one mode to the other. It's also suitable for babies up to 12 kg.

The **IGC Advance** booster sear provided the best support in our 90° side-impact crash test. Its sides support the head of a sleeping child and its high back provides good head support. It's easy to install.

■ **NOTE:** The manufacturer didn't respond to our requests for updated information on the following models (which were listed among the article's preferred buys) — they may still be available: the **SAFE-N-SOUND Baby Safety Capsule 2000/A/95**, a rear-facing baby restraint; and the **SAFE-N-SOUND Cosi Rider 25B/1/95**, a forward-facing child seat.

WHAT TO BUY

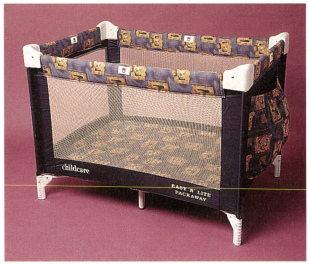
FORWARD-FACING CHILD SEAT	
SAFE-N-SOUND Discovery Plus 7000B/5/95	$219
CONVERTIBLE CHILD RESTRAINT (can be used as a baby restraint and child seat)	
SAFE-N-SOUND Galaxy 7000/J/95	$280
BOOSTER SEAT	
IGC Advance	$70

Portable cots

(July 2000)

If you're doing the rounds of friends and relatives at Christmas and have a small person in tow, you might want a portable cot to help.

■ **In a nutshell:** There's a new standard but it's not mandatory. None of the cots tested passed all the requirements we tested for, though they all passed the most important safety aspect (none collapsed). The **CHILDCARE** has a side pocket, insect net and the mattress can be secured to the base; but it's heavy to carry. The **FOLDAWAY**'s mesh failed the strength test, but it has upper position support and two castors, so it can be wheeled along when folded up in its bag.



WHAT TO BUY

CHILDCARE Easy n Lite CC600	$155
FOLDAWAY Momento 950	$189

Carry-on trolley suitcases

(October 2000)

You're going away but not for long, so you won't take much with you. In fact, it might all fit into one of these little numbers. They're small enough to be carry-on baggage on a plane, but big enough to kit you out for a short trip.

■ **In a nutshell:** The **PAKLITE** has tough fabric, is quite durable and easy to use, but it's one of the heavier models. The **AIRPORT** didn't rate well for fabric durability or water resistance, but the trialists loved its ease of use. Both of these have inside divider pockets, useful for the business traveller. The **RICARDO** is durable and easy to use but not very stable when standing on end.

WHAT TO BUY

PAKLITE 606 Mini Office	$185
AIRPORT Universal II Collection 788 OF	$130
RICARDO Mission Wheelaboard 9018	$149

Global positioning units

(May 2000)

If you're packing up the car and going bush this summer, you might want one of these handy little units with you: it'll listen to satellites and tell you where you are.

■ **In a nutshell:** All three models are easy to operate with one hand; have a data port for connecting to other navigation aids or a computer; a man-overboard button (that automatically registers your location as a waypoint and activates the navigation page to direct you back to it); and quick-reference cards. They can maintain a position fix even under medium tree cover, and have a position averaging feature to increase their accuracy. The **GARMIN 12XL** has an optional external antenna and can be used with a boat or car battery as a power source, as can the **MAGELLAN**.

WHAT TO BUY

GARMIN GPS 12	$452
GARMIN GPS 12XL	$599
MAGELLAN GPS 315	$494

Interest rates

— or why do I have to pay more for my mortgage to help the economy?

IN BRIEF

- Between November 1999 and October 2000 the Reserve Bank raised interest rates five times. The current rate for a standard home loan (as we go to press) is around 8%.
- Economists don't think we'll see ridiculously high mortgage interest rates like 17% again, but there may yet be more pain to come for home owners.

IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, WITH interest rates on the rise again, many home owners have glanced nervously at their newspaper, scanning the pages for news about the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) and interest rates.

Why does the RBA cause home owners all that pain? Why raise interest rates when the economy seems to be moving along fine? Read on for answers to these and other interest rate questions.

Who controls interest rates?

To influence our economy the government essentially has only two tools: fiscal and monetary policy.

- **Fiscal policy** is about how the government budgets to raise and spend money. Changes to fiscal policy or how the government budgets — such as introducing the GST — take a long time to be implemented and affect the economy.
- **Monetary policy** is action taken by the RBA to influence financial conditions such as exchange rates. The main tool of monetary policy is setting interest rates. They can be changed from one day to the next and quickly affect the economy.

The government appoints RBA board members. Currently the board has two members from the Reserve Bank (the RBA governor Ian Macfarlane and the deputy governor), one from the government (the head of Treasury) and six 'external' members. Five of those come from a business background, such as David Jones chair Dick Warburton. The sixth is an internationally well known academic, Adrian Pagan, Professor of Economics at the Australian National University.

The board meets on the first Tuesday of each month (except January) to discuss monetary policy and especially interest rates. On the days before the meeting there's usually a lot of speculation in the media about what the board will do.

Usually changes to interest rates are announced the next morning. However, there's no rule to stop the RBA from changing interest rates on any other day.

For example, in late July 1997 the governor asked the board before the board meeting to let him reduce interest rates by 0.5% because of good inflation and wages data. The board members agreed, so he announced the reduction of interest rates a week ahead of the August board meeting.

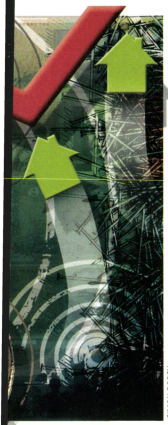
If the economy's booming, why raise interest rates?

The Reserve Bank Act states three objectives for monetary policy:

- Price (currency) stability.
- Maintenance of full employment.
- Economic welfare and prosperity of the people of Australia.

Instead of looking at each of these goals separately, the RBA tries to achieve all three at once by encouraging economic growth.

Michael Blythe, Chief Research Economist with the Commonwealth Bank, thinks the RBA has a good track record of achieving its goals in the last



SIMON BOSCH

decade. "It was faced with a lot of criticism, but the economic outcome was successful. We've had a period of strong growth, low inflation and falling unemployment," he says.

The RBA achieved this by keeping inflation within 2–3% a year and acting early in raising interest rates. Its reasoning is that if interest rates are raised early they won't have to go up as much.

So even when it looks as though the economy's going fine, the RBA puts on the brakes when forecasts show that inflation will move over 3% for the longer term.

This stops the economy from 'overheating', and instead of having the booms and busts of the '80s we should see a period of long-term, steady growth — or at least that's the theory.

How does it help the economy if I pay more interest to my bank?

Essentially, if you have to pay more interest for your borrowings, you won't borrow as much and you'll stop spending beyond your means.

Raising interest rates therefore keeps a check on consumer and business spending, which in turn stops inflation rising. The trick is not to raise rates too much, because if consumers and businesses suddenly stop spending, we end up with a recession.

So, is the RBA getting this right? "The current interest rate rises may cause the economy to slow, but hopefully not to stop," says Blythe.

How does the RBA control interest rates?

The RBA in fact controls only one specific interest rate: the **cash rate**, which is the rate used in the money market where, among other things, the banks and other big financial institutions store their spare cash overnight or for a short time, and raise funds for their short-term needs.

These are 'liquid' funds — money the banks need for day-to-day transactions and to settle accounts with other banks. (For example, Westpac pays Commonwealth for your Westpac cheque that your plumber has deposited in his Commonwealth account.)

The interest rate in the money market isn't fixed: it depends on supply and demand. If some institutions are storing a lot more funds there than others need to raise, supply exceeds demand and the interest rate goes down. And if there's less money than needed, demand makes the interest rate go up.

The RBA controls this supply and demand in the money market to keep the cash rate stable. Each morning it checks on how much money the other institutions are planning to store or raise in the market. Then it decides whether to take funds out of the market or inject funds into it to push the cash rate up or down as needed.

What relationship does the interest rate set by the RBA have to the rates I pay?

Until the mid-eighties the government set a limit for home loan rates, protecting home owners from high interest rates; but with those ceilings now removed, your lender determines your mortgage rate.

The Reserve Bank raises only the cash rate, not your mortgage. But when the cash rate goes up, banks and other mortgage providers have to pay more interest on the money *they* owe, and they feed their costs through to consumers.

Figure 1, below, shows that the interest rates you're charged on your home loan, personal loan or credit card and the interest rate you're paid on your term deposit or transaction account move largely in line with the cash rate.

There have been a few exceptions to this, one of which was in 1996 when home loans rates went down more than the cash rate did. This shows the second element behind interest rates: the margin the bank charges you on top of the cash rate.

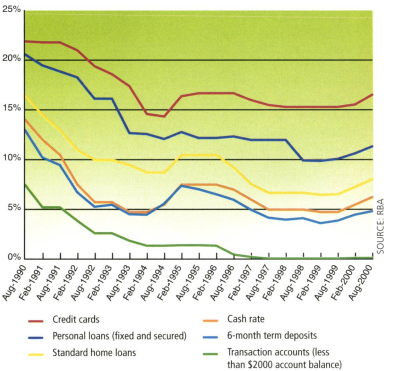
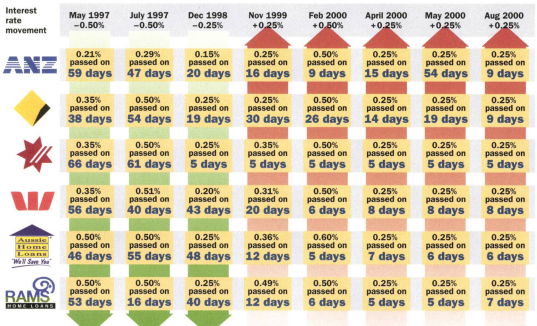


Figure 1. Interest rates move largely in line with the cash rate. The difference between it and the rates you earn or pay is the margin you're charged by the banks. Bank profits on home loan rates have fallen mainly due to more competition. However, margins on transaction accounts went up: the banks didn't pass on the latest rises to the cash rate and you still only earn a meagre 0.15% on average.


Interest rate movement
May 1997 −0.50%
July 1997 −0.50%
Dec 1998 −0.25%
Nov 1999 +0.25%
Feb 2000 +0.50%
April 2000 +0.25%
May 2000 +0.25%
Aug 2000 +0.25%
ANZ
0.21% passed on 59 days
0.29% passed on 47 days
0.15% passed on 20 days
0.25% passed on 16 days
0.50% passed on 9 days
0.25% passed on 15 days
0.25% passed on 54 days
0.25% passed on 9 days
0.35% passed on 38 days
0.50% passed on 54 days
0.25% passed on 19 days
0.25% passed on 30 days
0.50% passed on 26 days
0.25% passed on 14 days
0.25% passed on 19 days
0.25% passed on 9 days
0.35% passed on 66 days
0.50% passed on 61 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.35% passed on 5 days
0.50% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.35% passed on 56 days
0.51% passed on 40 days
0.20% passed on 43 days
0.31% passed on 20 days
0.50% passed on 6 days
0.25% passed on 8 days
0.25% passed on 8 days
0.25% passed on 8 days
Aussie Home Loans We'll See You
0.50% passed on 46 days
0.50% passed on 55 days
0.25% passed on 48 days
0.36% passed on 12 days
0.60% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 7 days
0.25% passed on 6 days
0.25% passed on 6 days
RAMS HOME LOANS
0.50% passed on 53 days
0.50% passed on 16 days
0.25% passed on 40 days
0.49% passed on 12 days
0.50% passed on 6 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 5 days
0.25% passed on 7 days

SOURCE: CANNEX

Figure 2. Some examples of how the major banks and others passed on interest rate increases or decreases to their customers. Increases have tended to reach consumers fast, while decreases have generally taken a month or more. And in some cases they passed on a higher increase than the RBA indicated.

MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT INTEREST RATES?

Talk to us in our 'Truth in lending' online forum. Go to www.choice.com.au, then to 'Forums', 'Money' and 'Loans and credit cards', where you'll find the 'Truth in lending' discussion. Access is free.

At that time, other mortgage providers like Aussie Home Loans entered the market, offering low interest rates and competing with banks for customers. To keep their customers, the banks had to lower their rates — effectively reducing what they charged you on top of the cash rate from around 3% to only 1.7% now.

However, both mortgage providers and banks manage to use the cash rate movements to their advantage. Figure 2, above, shows that while rate increases hurt home owners within a few days of a rate rise, it can take much longer until you get the benefit of *lower* rates. And sometimes lenders even pass on only part of the decrease or raise the rates higher than the RBA.

Interest on both my loan and my bonus saver account is calculated daily, but one is accrued daily and the other one six-monthly — what does this mean?

The more often the interest is accrued (paid into your deposit account or added to the amount you owe), the higher the rate you effectively earn or pay. This is because the effects of compound interest (interest paid or charged on interest) come into play if it's accrued more than once a year.

For example, if you're charged 8% on your home loan and interest is calculated and accrued daily, the effective rate you pay is 8.33%.

And if you found a great savings account that paid you 8% accrued every six months, your effective interest rate would be 8.16%.

Especially with home loans, you need to keep in mind that you're paying all sorts of charges like start-up fees and ongoing monthly charges as well as the interest rate. This means a honeymoon rate that might be advertised at only 4.99% could see you effectively paying 6.32% when everything's taken into account.

That's why CHOICE has been fighting hard for an 'average annualised percentage rate' (AAPR). This is an interest rate that's calculated as if it included all the costs you pay over seven years (the typical amount of time people keep a loan), and allows you to really compare different advertised interest rates and loan offers.

What does the future hold?

First, all this isn't gospel: even the experts are often wrong when they try to predict where interest rates are heading.

In early October a clear majority of economists was expecting the Reserve Bank to lift interest rates, but it didn't. And the interest rate rise in early August caught analysts off guard.

Experts do, however, say the home loan rates of 17% that were seen in the 1980s are a thing of the past.

"We're in a brand new world of interest rates," says Chris Richardson, a director of Access Economics. Like other economists, he thinks the RBA has learnt its lesson and that rates won't rise to such high levels again.

He sees the standard variable home loan rates for the longer term staying at around 8%, with possible lows of 6% and highs of 10%.

Other economists we talked to also said interest rates are close to their peak or have even already reached it. They count on a slowing in the world economy, stabilisation of the Australian dollar exchange rate and a lowering of petrol prices.

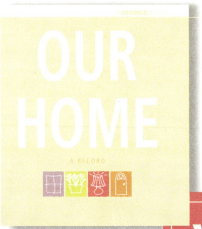
These factors and the inflation rate are the things you could watch out for when you're trying to guess what the Reserve Bank board will do at its next meeting. ❑

Gifts for everyone at this time of year

For the home owner...

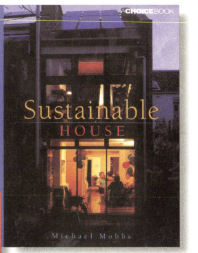
Our Home

A beautiful book that's also practical, *Our Home* is ideal for anyone who wants to keep a record of their home, its renovations, finances, furnishing and decoration. On each page there's ample space to write in all sorts of information from paint colours to tradespeople's contact details, or to draw plans of a room or garden area. A useful book for yourself or a wonderful gift. Hardcover.
$20.00 Code: OURH



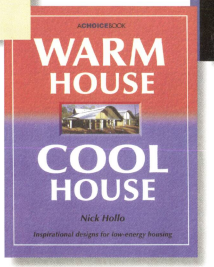
Sustainable House

Sustainable House explains how one family made their home almost completely self-sufficient in water, electricity and waste disposal. It has practical advice and useful contacts for home owners, builders, architects and councils. Colour and B&W photographs.
$35.00 Code: SUSH



Warm House Cool House

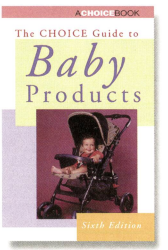
Warm House Cool House explains how low-energy buildings work, giving examples of over 110 inspirational Australian homes designed to provide a comfortable living environment for our various climates and save on power bills. Extensively illustrated with plans and photographs.
$33.00 Code: WHCH



When you're shopping...

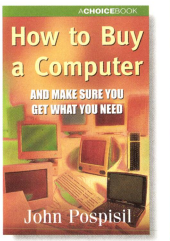
The CHOICE Guide to Baby Products

The *CHOICE Guide to Baby Products* has been a reliable source of information for families and friends of newborns since 1990. It starts with a checklist of what parents will need when the baby arrives, then gives reports of tests and surveys that have been carried out by CHOICE on cots, strollers, high chairs, baby monitors, baby carriers, change tables, nappies and clothes dryers, plus useful advice on a range of products and issues.
$18.00 Code: CBP6



How to Buy a Computer

If you're one of the thousands of Australians thinking about buying a computer, this best-selling guide is packed with unbiased and sensible advice. It includes details about what kinds of computers and software are available, the range of tasks computers can be used for, where to go shopping, how to find training and even how to do simple upgrades.
$16.00 Code: HBC4



For family and friends...

Caring for your feet

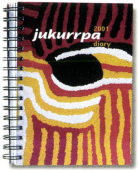
In simple language and with lots of diagrams and pictures, this book explains how feet work and provides foot health information for everyone from children to grandparents. It'll help the reader to identify and perhaps avoid common problems — from tinea, bunions and sore heels to shin splints, blisters and knee pain. And there's extra help for people with arthritis or diabetes.

$18.00 Code: FEET

2001 Jukurrpa Diary

Practically designed with a page per day for weekdays and half a page each day at weekends, this wiro-bound diary features a variety of beautiful Aboriginal artwork as its monthly dividers. It includes an address section, year planner, school and public holidays, and important dates in recent indigenous Australian history.

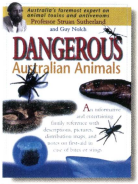
$21.90 Code: 2001



Dangerous Australian Animals

This is an entertaining yet practical and up-to-date guide to the dangerous wildlife of Australia. Some of the animals discussed include bluebottles, stonefish, king brown snakes, tiger snakes, ticks, funnel-webs, bull ants and leeches. It includes basic first aid advice and colour photos for identification.

$45.00 Code: DAA



Pocket Bushtucker

This is a pocket-sized guide to more than 180 central Australian 'bushtucker' plants. Each listing includes common, Aboriginal and scientific names, a description, habitat and uses. It includes colour and b&w illustrations.

$22.95 Code: PKBT

Taylor and Beyond

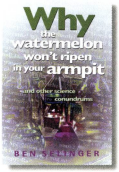
Written by respected cricket writer Malcom Knox, this fascinating read is the definitive account of the successes and controversies of Australian and international cricket in recent times. An ideal gift for the cricket enthusiast.

$27.95 Code: TAYL

Why the Watermelon Won't Ripen in your Armpit

An easy-to-read book about the facts and ideas behind our bizarre and not-so-bizarre everyday science. Ben Selinger uses humour to explain some of the more complex science issues that we face in our changing world.

$24.95
Code: WMAP



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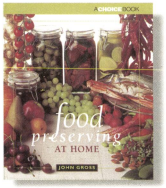
For food and wine lovers...

Food Preserving at Home

Learn how to preserve the best produce available so you can enjoy it all year round. *Food Preserving at Home* is written for an Australian audience and discusses many ways to preserve food safely, including bottling, canning, smoking, freezing, drying, and jams and jellies. It also contains a variety of delicious recipes for each preserving option.

$29.70 Code: FPAH



Collecting wine

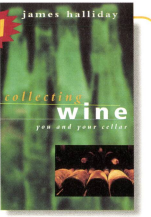
NEW

James Halliday

As seen on page 9.

A definitive guide to collecting wine at home. Written by one of Australia's foremost wine experts, it not only tells you how to set up your cellar but what to look for when you start collecting.

$27.44 Code: COLW



When you're looking for something to do...

Sydney For Kids

This is an invaluable guide to the places to go and things to do with a child in Sydney. Each entry includes details about transport, opening hours, costs and amenities. For babies and children to 12 years.

$16.50 Code: SFK

Hoyle's Official Rules of Card Games

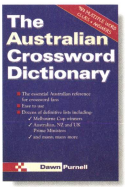
Written in a clear, readable style, this book explains the rules for over 100 popular card games. It has step-by-step instructions, easy to understand illustrations and includes advice about game strategies.

$14.95 Code: HRCG

The Australian Crossword Dictionary

An Australian and New Zealand guide to help you get that final clue in a crossword. This book doesn't just look at single-word clues but also includes more difficult multi-word clues.

$14.25
Code: TACD



Free and Low-cost Sydney and Free and Low-cost Melbourne

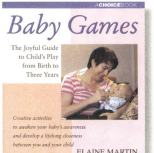
Read about where you can go for a free or low-cost fun day or night. Examples include a night at the taping of your favourite TV show or a lecture by a well-known personality. Or what about poetry readings, museums or even cemetery visits? Find them all in these two books about Australia's two largest cities.

Free and Low-cost Sydney
$16.50 Code: FLS2
Free and Low-cost Melbourne
$16.50 Code: FLCM

Baby Games

For children from birth to three years we have *Baby Games*. It's a fun book for parents and carers, full of ideas, rhymes, songs, finger plays, activities and games to help create a magical childhood

$22.00 Code: BGCB

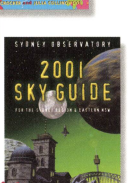


2001 Sky Guide

For the Sydney region and eastern NSW

This guide tells you when and where to find some of the year's most exciting celestial events. Useful for adults and budding astronomers, it makes both a perfect gift and reference guide.

$15.00 Code: 1SKY

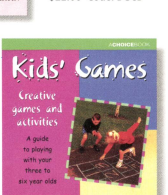


NEW

Kids Games

For children from three to six, we have *Kids' Games*. Written in the same practical, parent/carer-friendly style as *Baby Games*, *Kids' Games* is full of fun ideas for entertaining children without resorting to videos, computers or TV.

$22.00 Code: KGCB



Standby wattage — standby wastage

The average home is full of appliances and gadgets using electricity even when you're not actively using them. How much are you wasting?

IN BRIEF

- Individual appliances usually only use a few watts when on standby, but those tiny amounts can add up to about 10% of a household's electricity consumption — wasting your money and polluting the air.
- Switch appliances off whenever feasible, and look for the *Energy Star* label (see far right) when buying office and — starting in 2001 — home entertainment equipment.

THEY'VE BEEN INVADING YOUR home over the years, finding their way into every room in many disguises, their foul deeds hardly noticeable individually, but collectively slowly draining your wallet and polluting the air.

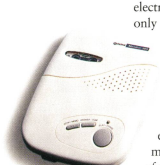
They may be your friends while you watch them (or listen to them, or otherwise use them), but as soon as you stop they turn against you.

Well, maybe that's a bit over the top, but electric and electronic appliances and gadgets spend a great deal of time — and your money — on standby rather than doing their job.

For example, your TV and VCR stand by for you to press the 'on' button on the remote so they can entertain you. And your cordless phone, fax and answering machine are plugged into a power point all day, waiting to be used.

The problem

Each appliance and gadget that's plugged in draws electricity when on standby, and sometimes even when switched off (for example, some printers and scanners). Often it's only a tiny amount of electricity — say, two or three watts — costing you only a few dollars a year.



However, overseas studies show those tiny amounts can add up to 10% of a household's electricity consumption. Just imagine: up to 10% of your electricity bill for appliances doing nothing. Nationally, that amounts to about $400 million in electricity costs a year and produces about four million tonnes of carbon dioxide, because most of the electricity is generated in power plants burning fossil fuels.

More research needed

CHOICE and some of our overseas counterparts have been measuring the standby power consumption of appliances for several years.

The differences between models are often considerable, as some of our latest results show:

- **Fax machines** (with and without an answering machine): 4.7–11.6 W.
- **VCRs:** 2.0–6.6 W.
- **TVs** (68 cm): 0.6–12.7 W.
- **Scanners** (flatbed): 8.3–14.2 W on standby; 0–5.1 W switched off.
- **Printers** (inkjet): 1.6–8.6 W on standby; 0–8.4 W switched off.

Thanks for volunteering: prizes in the draw for offering your home for standby power checks were two long-life bulbs and an energy-efficient shower head — see far right for the winners.

However, consumer organisations can usually only test a relatively small number of models and a limited range of products. That's why CHOICE has joined the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in a comprehensive project measuring consumption for a much wider range of products and models, which will provide a better estimate of how much the average household spends on standby power.

As part of the project, we visited 60 CHOICE and CHOICE Online readers in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, and measured the power consumption in various modes of all the electric and electronic appliances in their households. We'll be reporting on the results in a future issue of CHOICE.

The government's long-term goal is for no appliance to use more than 1 W while on standby. In the meantime, changes to the existing energy labels are meant to encourage manufacturers to reduce the standby power consumption of their products:

- The *Energy Star* label will be extended to home entertainment equipment in 2001 — we'll keep you posted.
- The energy rating label for large appliances (air conditioners, fridges, freezers, washing machines, clothes dryers and dishwashers) will be revised to include standby power consumption. Because this is a mandatory program, any changes to it are likely to take a while.

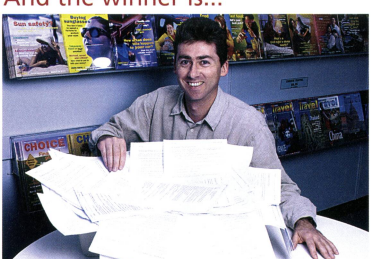
What you can do

- If possible, switch off appliances instead of leaving them on standby — for example, your TV and stereo system.
- If possible, switch off at the wall or unplug appliances you use only occasionally — for example, the chargers of your mobile phone or power tools.
- When shopping for a computer, fax machine, scanner or printer, look for the *Energy Star* label. It guarantees that the model minimises standby power consumption — for example, by automatically switching into a 'sleep' mode after a set time. Make sure you enable the function when installing the appliance.

For detailed information on the scheme, see the *Energy Star* website: www.energystar.gov.au. ❑

Look for this label on office equipment and (from 2001) home entertainment gear.

And the winner is...



In October CHOICE we asked for volunteers to offer their homes as part of the program to measure standby power consumption in Australian households (see *More research needed,* far left).

Thanks to all of you who volunteered. All the returned surveys went into the draw for five energy-smart kits, containing two long-life light bulbs and a water-efficient shower head (valued at about $80).

Congratulations to our winners:

- Ian Butterworth, Reservoir, Victoria.
- Ross Dawson, Eltham, Victoria.
- Joan Rowe, Kippa Ring, Queensland.
- Barry Thompson, Artarmon, NSW.
- Leanne Wiener, Macleod, Victoria.

Buying a barbie

Summer's the time for barbecues: how did eight gas trolley models measure up to the great Aussie pastime?

IN BRIEF

- Our tests found big differences between barbies in both cooking performance and ease of use.
- The hoods take a little getting used to, but generally they gave excellent results.
- Wooden trolleys are harder to keep clean than metal ones, and the bolts need constant tightening.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A GOOD barbecue — easy, pleasurable and sociable cooking. We put some of the big gas models with a hood to the test, enduring for days on end the smell of snags and steak emanating from the labs.

There's quite a range of trolley configurations and accessories to choose from (see *What to look for*, right), but we went for the basics: four burners covered by half hotplate and half grill. We evaluated the barbies and looked at how the trolleys they came with affected their ease of use.

The hood is good

Many people (including our tester) haven't used a gas barbecue with a hood before. The instructions with some models say once you're used to it you'll cook all your food with the hood down, and the results were impressive enough to convince our tester.

We cooked sausages and steaks with the hood open, and chicken wings and a whole chicken with the hood closed.

It's a fairly tough test — we don't move the food around (many people do constantly while it's cooking) so that we can test the evenness of heat over the whole cooking surface. There shouldn't be hot and cooler spots. While this really shows how well the barbecue can cook meat left to itself, you can probably get better results if you're prepared to be a more active cook.

There were two standout models for both cooking and ease of use: the **ALFRESCO G4ALFW** (wooden trolley) and the **RINNAI Selecta** (metal trolley).

WHAT TO BUY

ALFRESCO G4ALFW		**$849**
RINNAI Selecta	BEST BUY	**$699**

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

All the models in this test are gas barbecues with a hood; they'll need to be assembled with their trolley after purchase (see *Trolley — assembly*, page 42, for more on this).

Barbecue

- A large **cooking area** that's half grill and half hotplate.
- Good **access** to the whole cooking area (many hoods can restrict access, with side panels and warming racks over the cooking area. The **BEEFEATER** and the **COOK-ON** both have warming racks that get in the way when cooking.)
- A **hood** that opens up far enough so smoke isn't directed into your face (the shape of the hoods on the **BEEFEATER** and the **BENJA** sends a lot of the smoke into your face).
- A **thermometer** in the hood, though those in this test weren't very accurate. You may need to check its accuracy against an oven thermometer and adjust your cooking to that. The **AERO** doesn't have a thermometer.

- Enough space between the hood and **handle** so you don't burn your hands; and a handle on the fat tray (the **ALFRESCO**, **RINNAI**, **CORDON BLEU** and **COOK-ON** don't have one). A handle on the hotplate makes it easier to remove for cleaning, or you'll need a metal tool to lift it off.
- A **fat tray** that's easily removed and replaced and well-positioned to catch all the fat residue.
- Piezo **ignition**, activated by a pushbutton or the gas knob.

Continued on page 42

PROFILES

While the **ALFRESCO** and the **RINNAI** were the standout models, we've profiled the **CORDON BLEU, COOK-ON** and **SUNSHINE** too, as you'd probably be reasonably happy with them (especially if you found them at a good price). Prices shown are recommended retail.

ALFRESCO G4ALFW

RRP: $849

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall cooking score: best at cooking steak and chicken wings, and excellent at roasting whole chicken.
- Second best for ease of use.
- Good access to cooking food.
- Wheels plus castors make the tested trolley easy to move.
- Hotplate has handles for easy removal.

BAD POINTS

- Smallest hotplate area.
- No handle on the fat tray.

RINNAI SELECTA

BEST BUY

RRP: $699

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest barbie to use.
- Second best overall for cooking; very good at roasting whole chicken.
- Easiest to assemble and the best instructions.
- Good access to cooking food.
- Best controls.
- Wheels plus castors make the trolley easy to move.
- Metal trolley is easier to clean and more stable than these wooden trolleys.

BAD POINTS

- The fat tray is a little awkward to remove and replace, and doesn't have a handle.

CORDON BLEU G4CBW

RRP: $679

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.
- Very good at roasting whole chicken.
- The trolley usually supplied with this barbecue has wheels and castors, which make it easy to move. The trolley pictured is a different model.

BAD POINTS

- Gas bottle not securely held in place due to difficulty in securing the crossbar it hangs from.
- No handle on the fat tray.

COOK-ON LIMITED EDITION

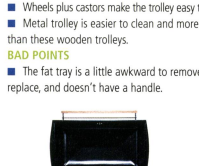
RRP: $799

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.
- Very good at roasting whole chicken.
- Wheels plus castors make the tested trolley easy to move.

BAD POINTS

- The warming rack is in the way of turning food at the back of the hotplate.
- The fat tray doesn't have a handle and is awkward to remove and replace.



SUNSHINE LEGEND HOMESTEAD 4000 LM4

RRP: $649

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at roasting whole chicken.
- Good access to cooking food.
- Lowest gas consumption.

BAD POINTS

- Some fat missed the fat tray, spilling onto the trolley shelf and tray handle.
- Hard to see if burners are alight.
- The tested trolley has only two wheels, and it's heavy to lift at the opposite end to move it.

What about the rest

- The **BENJA Chieftain** gave the worst cooking results, scoring only 36%. It was particularly poor at roasting chicken, scoring only 10% — it took 25 minutes to reach the recommended roasting temperature (compared with around 10 in other models), and the chicken was still raw in parts even after an extra 20 minutes' cooking. The barbecue wasn't faulty, so this result suggests the design of the hood may be the problem.

  In addition, the shape of its hood directs smoke into your face; there's nothing to stop the fat tray when you slide it in, so you need to be careful positioning it; and the barbecue isn't bolted to the trolley. It also has the highest gas consumption.
- The **BEEFEATER Beefmate** scored only 49% for cooking performance.
- Though the **AERO Rivergum** cooked a whole chicken well, its sausage and steak scores were poor. Its hood leans a little forward, directing some smoke into your face, and it can accidentally close if bumped. It also doesn't have a thermometer in the hood.

GAS BARBECUES

Brand / model (in rank order)	Trolley model	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*	Origin (BBQ)	Warranty (years)	Barbecue dimensions (L x W, (mm) **	Trolley dimensions (L x W x H, mm) ***
ALFRESCO G4ALFW	JTS2631C	Barbeques Galore	849	Australia	3 / 2 / 1 **(E)**	805 x 515	1535 x 505 x
RINNAI Selecta **(A)**	Modular	Rinnai Australia	699	Australia	3	810 x 625	1570 x 460 x
CORDON BLEU G4CBW	FTD2631C	Barbeques Galore	679	ns	3 / 2 / 1 **(E)**	805 x 570	1500 x 500 x
COOK-ON Limited Edition	FTM 2631C **(C)**	Pricotech Leisure Brands	799	Australia	3 / 2 / 1 **(E)**	800 x 570	1530 x 505 x
SUNSHINE Legend Homestead 4000 LM4 **(B)**	4-burner hardwood **(B)**	Sunshine General Industries	649	Malaysia	5 / 2 **(F)**	930 x 560	1590 x 560 x
AERO Rivergum hooded barbecue 40100SS	Jarrah trolley 40257	Aero Barbecue	539 **(D)**	Australia	10 / 5 / 1 **(G)**	810 x 580	1565 x 480 x
BEEFEATER Beefmate 4	HWT 3/4	Woodland Home Products	574	Australia	5 / 3 / 1 **(H)**	855 x 530	1390 x 500 x
BENJA Chieftain	Drop-in Deluxe	Benja	899	ns	5 / 1 **(J)**	815 x 510	1470 x 515 x

* Prices shown are recommended retail, including the trolley.
** Hood, hinges, knobs, handles, etc, may extend past these dimensions.
*** Width doesn't include wheels, which may extend past these dimensions.
Height is side tray height.
ns Not stated.
(A) Sold exclusively through Harvey Norman stores.
(B) Sold as a package under model number LH4000.
(C) This trolley will be discontinued in December but should still be available in stores.
(D) Excluding trolley.
(E) Enamel frame and cast iron cooking surface / burners, regulators and hose / rock tray and auto lighter.
(F) Cast iron / all other components
(G) All stainless steel components / porcelainised housings, burners, manifold assemblies and brass valves / all other components.
(H) Frame and body of hood / burners, cooktops and valves / piezo ignition, trolley and all other parts.
(J) Frame and hood / all other parts.
(K) This now has vaporiser grids instead of the volcanic rock system we tested.
(L) Removable meat-probe type.
(M) Indicates warm to high, not degrees.
(N) You still have to buy the trolley as well.

CONTROLS

Controls should be well labelled, easy to grip and turn, with a positive feel. If they slant out from the fascia they're easier to see than those that don't, so you won't need to bend over as much. The **RINNAI** was the best in this regard. All the other models (except the **BENJA**) were OK, though their controls have a vague feel about them.

The **BENJA** controls also have a light, vague feel and it's possible to rotate them past the stop position so you aren't quite sure of the setting; you also have to bend over to see them, and the piezo ignition failed during testing.

Continued from page 40

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Trolley

We tested the barbecues with the trolleys they were supplied with, but many different trolleys are available, made from different materials and with a wide range of features, such as storage compartments and extra burners. You'll usually be able to mix and match the barbecue and trolley to suit your needs.

- Choose extra features you need and will use (such as storage cupboards, side burner, side tray and so on).
- Ensure the **height** of the trolley is suitable for you.
- Even if you'll move the trolley only occasionally, you'll appreciate two **castors** as well as two **wheels**; if it has only two wheels, check that it isn't too heavy to lift the other end and that there aren't any sharp edges where you grip it.
- **Wooden** trolleys will continually need the bolts tightening; **metal** trolleys shouldn't.
- A wooden trolley is harder to **clean** than a metal one and will eventually stain; a metal trolley may eventually rust in some climates.
- **Assembly** of wooden trolleys can be difficult and time-consuming (most of the test models took our tester several hours each) and will need two people working on it at some stages. If you can't get it pre-assembled, if may be worth spending a bit extra to have the retailer do it for you.

How much gas do they use?

We measured gas consumption with all four burners on full and found quite a difference between models. It ranged from 880 g/hr (**SUNSHINE Legend**) up to 1510 g/hr (**BENJA Chieftain**). The average was about 1300 g/hr.

Unfortunately, when you get a gas bottle refilled, you're charged the full amount regardless of how much is left in the bottle. Here are some tips to tell how much is left:

- Weigh the bottle, then subtract the tare weight stamped on the side to get the weight of the gas left.
- Look for the condensation that forms on the side of the bottle when it's in use — it only forms on the part containing the liquid gas (pouring hot water over the bottle can accentuate this).
- The best method is to fit a gas safety switch, which not only tells you how much gas is left but also cuts off the gas if the hose is damaged.

A gas safety switch is handy — see above.

It's illegal to fill a gas bottle that's more than 10 years old (the date is stamped on the bottle). They can be checked and restamped for a further 10 years, but in the case of a smaller-capacity bottle, it's probably just as cheap to buy a new one (though not as environmentally kind).

1			2	3	4	5	6	
s	Flame diffuser	Thermometer hood	Can be built-in	Gas consumption (g / hour)	Cooking score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand / model (in rank order)
castors	Volcanic rock	✓	✓	1380	80	82	81	**ALFRESCO** G4ALFW
castors	Metal	✓ **(L)**		1160	71	88	78	**RINNAI** Selecta **(A)**
castors	Ceramic rock	✓	Not easily	1370	66	84	73	**CORDON BLEU** G4CBW
castors	Ceramic rock	✓	✓	1350	70	72	71	**COOK-ON** Limited Edition
	Metal	✓	✓ **(N)**	880	64	68	66	**SUNSHINE** Legend Homestead 4000 LM4 **(B)**
	Metal		✓	1220	54	62	57	**AERO** Rivergum hooded barbecue 40100SS
	Volcanic rock **(K)**	✓	✓	1320	49	52	50	**BEEFEATER** Beefmate 4
	Volcanic rock	✓ **(M)**	✓	1510	36	54	43	**BENJA** Chieftain

For starters...

If you're a first-time barbie owner, there are a few basics you'll also need.

- **Gas bottle** — if you don't connect the barbie to a mains gas outlet, you'll need to buy a gas bottle; the most usual size is 9 kg. (See *How much gas do they use?*, left.)
- A gas **safety switch** is a good idea because it'll turn the gas off if the hose is accidentally damaged. It also incorporates a meter to indicate the gas level.
- If you're a novice to the fine and pleasurable art of barbecuing, you'll need appropriate **tools**: long-handled tongs and a food turner with a serrated edge. And for any of the tested models our tester recommends buying an oven thermometer (see *What to look for*, page 40).
- As for the **fat tray**, most manufacturers of the tested models recommend lining it with aluminium foil and some sand to absorb the fat residue, which we found quite adequate. You can buy commercial 'fat soak' from barbecue stores, but it costs about $7.65 for 2 kg.

1 Flame diffuser

The models in this test use three methods to keep the flames away from direct contact with the food (see photos, right):

- Volcanic rocks (top), which sit on a wire frame and look much like coals in a solid-fuel barbecue.
- Ceramic rocks or 'beads' (centre), which sit on a metal plate with holes in it.
- Metal flame diffuser or 'tamer', which is a metal sheet with slots.

No method in itself guaranteed good cooking performance; it seems to be the barbie's overall design that counts.

2 Can be built-in

If you don't want your gas barbecue on a movable trolley, you can build the ticked models into a fixed structure.

3 Gas consumption

We tested all the models using a 9 kg gas bottle, which is a good size for these models — much smaller and you'll be getting it refilled quite frequently. See *How much gas do they use?*, for details.

4 Cooking score

This score includes the barbie's performance at cooking:

- Sausages: 25%.
- Steak: 25%.
- Marinated chicken wings: 25%.
- Whole roast chicken: 25%.

5 Ease of use score

This score includes the ease of doing the following:

- Cooking: 40%.
- Moving the trolley: 20%.
- Using the controls: 20%.
- Cleaning: 20%.

6 Overall score

- Cooking: 60%.
- Ease of use: 40%.

Want that wood flavour?

Fat catches fire and flares up when it drips through the flame diffuser onto the flames on its way to the fat tray. That's what gives the food its characteristic barbecue flavour. But what if you want to recreate the 'original' taste of a wood-fired barbie?

We tried the barbecues with flavoured wood chips, to see if we got that 'genuine' wood-fired flavour, and if it enhanced the taste of the meat.

We used two flavours of **CHARCOAL COMPANION Smoking Chips for Barbecues** — hickory wood and apple wood — and compared them to beef roasted without the wood chips.

It costs $10.95 for 128 cubic inches of wood chips (about 600–700 grams). One handful (the amount recommended in the instructions) weighs about 40–50 grams. On this basis you'd get around 14 uses per pack at a cost of about 80 cents per use.

Several lucky members of our lab staff tasted the meat. All but one could taste the flavour from the wood chips. Some thought it was strong, others didn't. The flavour was stronger on the outside of the meat; and the hickory tasted stronger than the apple. Some people preferred the flavoured meat, some didn't — so try it for yourself to see if it suits your taste.

Ice cream made *at* home

If you can do without stabilisers, emulsifiers, artificial colours and flavours in your ice cream, a home ice cream maker may be just the thing for your summer treats.

IN BRIEF

- There were only three models on the market to test (and another released too late). All of them make good-quality ice cream.
- The **PHILIPS** stands out for producing very good ice cream. The **BREVILLE** gives good results and is the easiest to use. The **DELONGHI**'s ice cream is good too, but it's way behind for ease of use.

WHAT BETTER TREAT during a long, hot summer than a delicious home-made ice cream made with fresh, good-quality ingredients? It'll taste just as good as some of the 'premium' ice creams you can buy from the shops — or better. And it'll be free of stabilisers, emulsifiers, artificial colours and flavours, all of which are in many commercial ice creams.

Ice cream makers churn ingredients to produce a thickened, moderately frozen product that's supposed to be fairly firm (though softer than ice cream you buy in a shop), of uniform consistency and a smooth, creamy texture.

The only downside is that home-made ice cream melts quickly once removed from the freezer bowl and becomes very hard if you refreeze leftovers. Manufacturers recommend storing (refreezing) it for a short time only, because its stucture changes after a week or two, affecting quality and texture. So it's best to make it just before you want to eat it — and then finish it off!

We tested all the domestic ice cream makers on the market — only three models were available. Several brands (such as Krups, Moulinex, Ronson and Sunbeam) have discontinued their ice cream makers, and a Mistral model was released too late for inclusion in the test.

Making ice cream at home

The first and most important step in making ice cream or any other frozen dessert in an ice cream maker is to freeze the freezer bowl. It has double-sided walls with a cooling

WHAT TO BUY

PHILIPS Delizia HR 2303	$112
BREVILLE Scoop Factory ICM 10	$90

liquid inside — usually a non-toxic salt solution — that has to be frozen thoroughly before use.

Depending on the freezer temperature, this can take up to 24 hours, so if you want to be able to make ice cream on the spur of the moment, keep the freezer bowl in the freezer so it's ready any time. Wrap the thoroughly dried bowl in a plastic bag so your fingers won't freeze onto it when you take it out, and place it upright towards the back of your freezer where it's coldest.

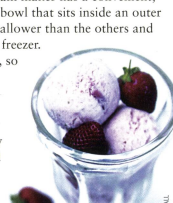
Shake the bowl before you use it to ensure the liquid inside its walls is completely frozen. If you can still hear it sloshing, it needs more time in the freezer. Once it's frozen through, you switch on the machine and pour the prepared ice cream mixture into the bowl (through a feeder hole in the lid) with the motor running — check the manufacturer's instructions for exact details. Try one of our recipes, right and page 46.

The bowl freezes the mixture in contact with it, while the stirrer scrapes this from the sides of the bowl and churns the ingredients for even consistency. Churning time varies from 15 to 45 minutes; it took us 15–25 minutes to make the ice creams in our test.

Design differences

The **PHILIPS** ice cream maker has a convenient, lightweight freezer bowl that sits inside an outer plastic bowl. It's shallower than the others and easy to store in the freezer. It's also fairly wide, so it's easy to pour or scoop out the ice cream. The **DELONGHI** freezer bowl is fairly heavy in comparison, and narrower, making it more awkward to scoop or pour the ice cream out, as its exterior can become quite icy

Continued on page 46



VANESSA MARSHALL

STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM

Ingredients:
1 egg
½ cup milk
¾ cup castor sugar
1½ cups strawberries
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups thickened cream

Preparation:
Place egg, milk, sugar, strawberries and vanilla into a food processor or blender and process until smooth and the sugar is dissolved. Add cream and process until just combined. Refrigerate the mixture in the mixing bowl for one hour before pouring it into the ice cream maker.

PROFILES

Profiles are of all the models tested, in rank order from left to right.

PHILIPS DELIZIA HR 2303

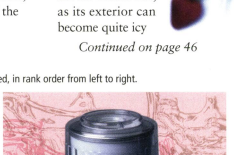
Recommended retail price: $112

GOOD POINTS

- Makes very good ice cream.
- Lightweight, wide freezer bowl makes for easy freezer storage and pouring.
- Additional freezer bowls can be ordered — handy if you want to make more than one type of ice cream at a time.
- Most parts can be replaced.

BAD POINTS

- Controls are positioned poorly and a little stiff, but fairly easy to operate.
- Motor unit and lid are awkward to remove from the base.



BREVILLE SCOOP FACTORY ICM 10

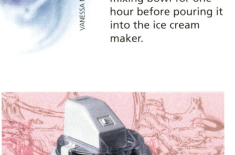
Recommended retail price: $90

GOOD POINTS

- Makes good ice cream.
- The easiest to use.
- Maximum fill indicator on stirrer.
- Additional freezer bowls can be ordered — handy if you want to make more than one type of ice cream at a time.
- Control switch is well positioned.
- Comprehensive, easy to understand instructions including troubleshooting guide and recipes.

BAD POINTS

- Freezer bowl is a little heavy and slippery when frozen because ice builds up around the exterior, so pouring the mixture out of the bowl can be awkward.



DELONGHI GELATO ITALIA IC5000

Recommended retail price: $159

GOOD POINTS

- Makes good ice cream.
- Compact size, takes up very little bench space.
- Control switch is well positioned.

BAD POINTS

- The hardest to use.
- The motor unit is very difficult to remove from the lid for cleaning — and there are no instructions for this.
- Very narrow lid opening.
- The freezer bowl becomes heavy and slippery when frozen because ice builds up around the exterior, so pouring out the mixture can be a bit difficult.

CHOC NUT ICE CREAM

Ingredients:
1 egg
½ cup milk
½ cup castor sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
100 g dark chocolate, melted
2 cups thickened cream
25 g chocolate drops
2 tablespoons hazelnuts, roasted and chopped

Preparation:
Beat egg, milk, sugar, vanilla and melted chocolate until sugar is dissolved. Add cream and beat until just combined. Refrigerate the mixture in the mixing bowl for one hour before pouring it into the ice cream maker. Process as usual and add the chocolate drops and chopped hazelnuts when the mixture starts to thicken.

Continued from previous page

and slippery. On both models, the plastic stirrer (or paddle) turns to churn the ingredients.

The **BREVILLE** freezer bowl is different: it sits on top of the motor unit and rotates, while the stirrer stays stationary. As on the **DELONGHI**, the bowl is fairly narrow, a little heavy and can become slippery when frozen.

All the ice cream makers tested make good-quality ice cream. They all passed our electrical safety tests and are relatively easy to clean in warm, soapy water. None of the parts is dishwasher safe.

The **PHILIPS** stands out for making very good ice cream; the **BREVILLE** gives good results and is easiest to use. The **DELONGHI**'s ice cream is good too, but the machine is way behind for ease of use, mainly because it's quite hard to assemble and take apart for cleaning. Its instructions don't mention how to remove the motor unit from the lid. We had to contact the manufacturer to find out how, and even then it was still a bit awkward.

VANESSA MARSHALL

When it's really hot

There are no comments with any of the ice cream makers about how well they work in a hot climate, but our tester thought room temperature below about 23°C while preparing the ice cream would be desirable. So what if it's hotter?

One of our subscribers from the Northern Territory recently told us that the type of ice cream maker we tested (where the bowl has to be frozen) doesn't work properly in tropical climates. But domestic versions of another type of ice cream maker, that works like a mini refrigerator, aren't available in Australia.

For best results:

- Refrigerate the ice cream mixture for at least one hour before processing. If you make a frozen dessert that's been heated during preparation (such as a boiled sugar syrup for sorbet), refrigerate the mixture overnight before processing.
- Have everything ready and chilled before you take the bowl out of the freezer.
- Ensure the bowl is completely frozen before use.
- Prepare the ice cream in the early morning or late afternoon, when it's cooler than in the middle of the day.
- If the recipe calls for alcohol, add it during the last minutes of processing, because it inhibits the freezing process.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The design and shape of the **stirrer/paddle** can make a difference when churning the ingredients. It should scrape all the base and sides of the freezer bowl to help distribute the ingredients evenly.
- The design of the **freezer bowl** can influence how well the ice cream freezes. A bowl with a wide base (like the **PHILIPS**) has a larger surface area for freezing the ingredients than a deeper, narrower bowl of the same volume.
- The three **freezer bowls** in this test vary in shape and size. Make sure the one you buy fits into your freezer compartment. Ideally it should be light, a practical shape and size to easily hold and pour the mixture from, and have a maximum fill indicator (either on the bowl or the stirrer/paddle).
- The **component parts** should fit together and come apart easily. They should be easy to clean and have few cracks or crevices where food can get trapped.
- The **control switch** should be positioned for easy access.

VANESSA MARSHALL

The Philips stirrer is well designed to scrape all the sides and base of the freezer bowl where the mixture begins to freeze. It then distributes this frozen mixture throughout the bowl to create an even consistency.

ICE CREAM MAKERS

Brand / model (in rank order)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*	Origin	Warranty (years)	Claimed capacity (mL)	1 Freezer bowl dimensions (H x W, mm)	2 Ice cream quality score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Overall score (%)
PHILIPS Delizia HR 2303	Philips	112	Austria	1	800	95 x 200	90	68	79
BREVILLE Scoop Factory ICM 10	Breville	90	Taiwan	1	1000	150 x 180	79	75	77
DELONGHI Gelato Italia IC5000	Parex Industries	159	Italy	1	1500	180 x 190	76	50	63

* Prices shown are recommended retail.

For people with a disability

The **BREVILLE Scoop Factory ICM 10** is most suitable for many disabilities, including hand weaknesses such as arthritis or Parkinson's, poor co-ordination and visual impairment.

- It has a large dial knob at the front. The labelling is simple with a good colour contrast.

A person with arthritis or a weakness in their fingers may need a little force to use the knob, but there's good finger grip.

- It's very easy to assemble, and the lockable lid requires little strength to turn and remove.
- It's fairly easy to clean.
- It has clear and concise instructions with diagrams that are very easy to understand.
- Unfortunately, though, it can be a bit awkward to remove the ice cream, as the freezer bowl is a little heavy to lift.

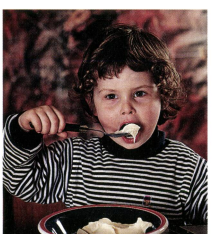
HANDLE WITH CARE

On two of the three models tested, we noticed a small amount of the cooling liquid leaking out after use. On the **PHILIPS** it leaked from around the rim of the bowl, and on the **DELONGHI** from a small puncture on the internal wall of the freezer bowl. It's possible to damage the bowl if you use sharp utensils, but we hadn't used any during the test. Both replacement models were fault-free.

Serving up a scoop

The basic ingredients for most ice creams include full cream, sugar, eggs and milk. The type of each ingredient you use produces different results:

- The higher the fat content of the **cream**, the richer and creamier the ice cream. Reducing the amount of cream and substituting milk for some of it will produce a drier, firmer ice cream.
- The type of **milk** affects the ice cream's texture and flavour. Low-fat milk produces an icier ice cream; buttermilk is also low in fat, but will give you a creamier result than low-fat milk.
- Castor **sugar** is a better choice than ordinary sugar because it dissolves more readily. You can also use icing sugar, honey, brown sugar or artificial sweetener. Watch your quantities, though. Too much sugar can prevent the mixture from freezing, and too little can result in a very hard ice cream. If the sugar doesn't dissolve completely, you'll get a grainy texture.
- **Chocolate chips, nuts** and **fruit** (fresh, canned, frozen, jam) can be added to ice cream when the mixture starts to thicken.



No artificial colours or flavours, but kids'll still love it.

Far left and on page 45 are two ice cream recipes to get you going. They're cream-based mixtures and are 20–30% fat; we also made a low-fat strawberry ice cream and a lemon sorbet that only contain negligible amounts. The recipes have vanilla extract in them; you can, of course, use the seeds of a real vanilla pod, if you like, but that'll add an extra step and preparation time.

1 Freezer bowl dimensions

This is the height and diameter of the bowl that needs to be frozen for use. Check these before you buy if you have limited freezer space or shelf height. All models can be stored easily in a cupboard when fully assembled.

2 Ice cream quality score

We made four types of ice cream in all the ice cream makers and assessed it for consistency (uniformly thickened), texture and distribution (smooth and creamy, not grainy). The taste wasn't bad either!

- Vanilla — to see how well each machine churns and freezes ice cream ingredients.
- Choc nut — to assess the distribution of chocolate chips and nuts.
- Lemon sorbet — to see how well the machines produce a water-based frozen dessert.
- Low-fat strawberry ice cream — to assess the machines' ability to produce a low-fat ice cream with different ingredients.

We also noted how long it took to produce the ice cream and whether its volume had sufficiently expanded.

3 Ease of use score

We assessed how easy the controls are to use, how easy the machine is to assemble and clean and how easy it is to pour the mixture.

4 Overall score

Ice cream quality and ease of use each contribute 50% to the overall score.

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: GAF Control has recalled **Tiffany Electric Frypan**, model no. FP–1220, on sale in Australia since November 1999. The model number can be found on the power inlet surround.

The problem: A mechanical fault with the frypan's earth terminal could cause users to get an electric shock.

What to do: Stop using the frypan. Return it to the place of purchase for a full refund. For more information phone 1800 629 489 between 8 am and 5 pm (AEDT).

THE PRODUCT: Zip Industries has recalled **Zip HydroTap and Zip Tea Tap** undersink instant boiling water heaters, purchased between July 1, 1998, and August 25, 2000.

The problem: An electrical wiring fault has been detected that could lead to an electric shock.

What to do: Unplug the unit from the power supply. Contact Zip on 1800 789 060 to arrange for a free inspection, testing and the correction of any fault detected.

THE PRODUCT: Compaq Computer Australia has recalled **Armada E500** and **V300 notebook computer battery packs**. The affected battery packs have one of the following date codes and serial numbers:

- TCGK 00001–10500.
- TCGK 20001–21800.
- TCGK 40001–83100.
- TCHK 40001–44700.

The problem: An apparent manufacturing problem may cause the battery packs to short-circuit, causing them to overheat, release smoke, damage the notebook computer and possibly catch fire.

What to do: Stop using the battery, but first discharge it before removing it from the computer. Customers affected by this recall will receive two free battery packs for each recalled battery. For further information and instructions, contact Compaq on 1300 368 369, or see its website: www.compaq.com/products/notebooks/batteryrecall.

THE PRODUCT: CA Australia has recalled its soft toy called **Tickle the Doodat**, sold at Woolworths Variety and Crazy Prices stores from mid-September 1999. The plush toy is purple with a pink face, hands and tummy.

The problem: Fails the tension test of Australian Standard AS1647.2. The eyes of the toy may become loose and pose a choking threat to young children.

What to do: Stop using the toy. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For a replacement, mail the toy to: Freepost Reply Paid 993, CA Australia, Brookvale 2100. Include a return address. For further information phone 1800 358 335.

THE PRODUCT: Coles Myer has recalled **Mood Candle Pots** purchased from either the Myers Direct Spring 2000 catalogue, or the Primary Layers B Edition 2 Summer 1999 catalogue.

The problem: When heated, the jar can become fragile, making it potentially dangerous to pick up, hold or move.

What to do: Complete the return form in the catalogue and return it for a refund to: Reply Paid, Myer Direct, Customer Service Department, ULD28, State Parcel Centre, Port Melbourne 3207. For further information phone 1800 550 100.

THE PRODUCT: Tieman Industries has recalled its **wheelchair restraint tracking systems** installed in the floor of a vehicle:

- Belt lap part no. 551942L.
- Belt lap-sash part no. 551953L.
- Rear wheelchair strap (blue) part no. 551944L.
- Front wheelchair strap (red) part no. 551943.

The problem: These parts don't meet the requirements of Australian Standard AS9242 (1994).

What to do: Contact Tieman Industries on (03) 9460 5111 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Honda Australia has recalled the following products:

- **S2000 sports cars**, 2000 and 2001 models.

The problem: The seatbelt retractor may be kept in the locked position, thus preventing passengers from pulling out the belt for buckling.

What to do: Contact your Honda dealer. For more information, phone (03) 9285 5555.

- **Odyssey EXI** vehicles, 2000 models.

The problem: The tyre placard has listed an incorrect speed rating. While the tyres fitted to the vehicle are correct, replacement tyres may have an incorrect rating.

What to do: Contact your Honda dealer. For further information phone (03) 9285 5555.

- **TRX350 motorcycles**, 2000 and 2001 models.

The problem: Possible cracking in the front upper suspension mountings on the main frame. The upper suspension arm may break away from the frame, causing the machine to lose steering ability and control.

What to do: Contact your Honda motorcycle dealer. For further information phone (03) 9270 1111.

- **TRX400EX motorcycles**, 2000 and 2001 models.

The problem: Possible incorrect assembly procedure relating to the disc brake calipers may cause excessive noise, inefficient braking and damage to components.

What to do: Contact your Honda motorcycle dealer. For further information phone (03) 9270 1111.

THE PRODUCT: Volvo Car Australia has recalled **Volvo S80** cars, 1999 and 2000 models.

The problem: The ball joint in the front suspension may exhibit increased wear, which may affect the steering.

What to do: Contact your Volvo dealer. For further information call (02) 9903 9200.

THE PRODUCT: Triumph Motorcycle Company has recalled the **Triumph Sprint ST, Sprint RS** and **Tiger** range of models.

The problem: There is potential for a fuel leak to develop on fuel gauge sender units fitted to these models.

What to do: Contact your Triumph dealer for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Case Corporation has recalled **Case 75XT skid steer loaders** bearing product identification numbers prior to JAF0317837.

The problem: The skid steer loader may move unexpectedly until the parking brake pin is fully engaged.

SAFETY ALERT

THE PRODUCT: Felton Grimwade & Bickford have issued a safety alert for consumers who have bought its **Goanna Eucalyptus Oil** (100 mL) and **Bosisto's Eucalyptus Oil** (100 mL). This is not a product recall.

The problem: The locking mechanism on the child-resistant cap may not engage when the bottle is closed.

What to do: Check by turning the cap anti-clockwise with no downward pressure — you should hear a clicking sound, and the lid should not come off. Don't rely solely on the child-resistant cap for prevention of poisoning — the products should always be kept out of reach of children. For more information phone (03) 9562 7711.

What to do: Contact your Case dealer to arrange a free upgrade for your machine. For further information phone (02) 9673 7777.

THE PRODUCT: Air Brake Corporation of Australia has recalled **Bendix trucks** with an EC17 Antilock controller. The EC17 Antilock controller is used in Bendix truck ABS systems, and was introduced around July 1998.

The problem: Chafing of a sensor cable against a rotating component may generate false sensor signals, resulting in possible transient brake failure at very low speeds.

What to do: Contact Air Brake Corporation on (02) 9477 7000 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: BMW Australia has recalled **R1100s motorcycles** fitted with (optional) high-rise handlebars.

The problem: Testing has shown that the handlebars may twist out of position.

What to do: Contact your BMW dealer to arrange for inspection and repair. For more information phone 1800 813 299.

Weekly updates of recalls and bans are posted on the CHOICE website at www.choice.com.au. You can also email us any recalls or bans not on this list at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

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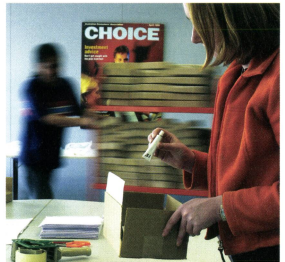

VANESSA MARSHALL

After squeezing toothpaste out of one tube into another (unmarked) one, it's packed up and sent to our keen and helpful CHOICE Home Testers. Keep your eyes peeled for the trial results.

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION

The Australian Consumers' Association is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance the quality of life for consumers. It is a Council member of Consumers International.

We are completely independent. We buy all the products we test at random in the marketplace; we never accept products to be tested as gifts or loans from manufacturers or retailers. We are not beholden to any commercial, government or union interests, and we don't accept advertising, paid or unpaid. Our income is derived from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and products.

We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a **Best Buy**. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted. Financial information in CHOICE is of a general nature, and is not intended to be advice on individual investments.

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~TANNING SALON~

We are proud to provide you with the state of the art, most advanced, Hollywood Star's favourite sunbeds *SunnySkame* & *Dr. Mueller* sunbeds, the No.1 Solarium from Germany since 1927. Our sunbeds not only give you a great tan in 10 minutes but provide a rich source of Vitamin "D" and help relive the day's Stress & Anxiety.

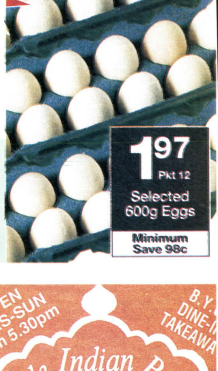
Burwood

since 1927. Our sunbeds not only give you a great tan in 10 minutes but provide a rich source of Vitamin "D" and help relive the day's Stress & Anxiety.

Burwood

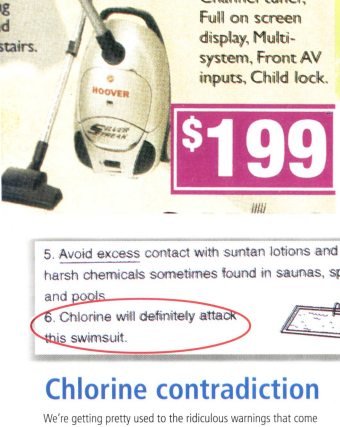
Once is enough

Surely the last thing you'd want to do is *relive* the day's stress and anxiety!



Eggstraordinary!

Pity the poor hens that laid 600 g eggs! Or perhaps they were the mutant four-legged chickens from October's *Hard Word*?



Silver Streak
Mono with Teletext, 100 Channel tuner, Full on screen display, Multi-system, Front AV inputs, Child lock.

$199

Demarcation dispute?

Well, they say TV sucks you in – presumably this vacuum cleaner is some form of retaliation.

In the comfort of your own home

Home-delivered belly dancers, eh? I wonder how many people took that one up …

5. Avoid excess contact with suntan lotions and harsh chemicals sometimes found in saunas, spas and pools.
6. Chlorine will definitely attack this swimsuit.

Chlorine contradiction

We're getting pretty used to the ridiculous warnings that come with swimsuits — don't use in the sun, avoid contact with chlorine, suntan lotion, sand, swimming pool edges, etc. (What'll be next? Dry clean only?)

But one of our readers thought she'd at least overcome the chlorine problem with this 'chlorine-resistant swimwear' — until she read the other card that came with it.

How about a little help?

The hard word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to H Coleman, K Godfrey, W Guerrini, A Gunter, R Rogowski, D Turner and E Wachtershauser for their contributions to this month's *The hard word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The hard word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.

Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204